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SCIENCE FICTION

AUGUST 1958

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TO MARRY MEDUSA
By
THEODORE STURGEON

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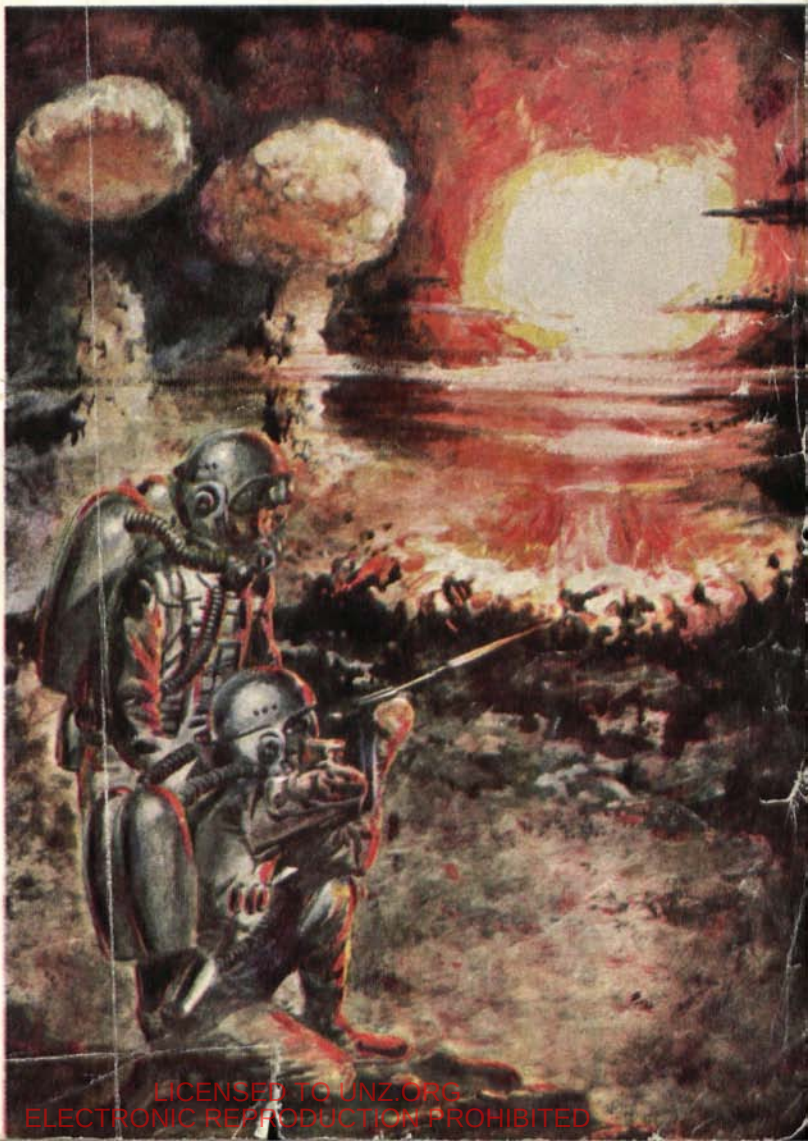
HOW TO GET AROUND ON OTHER PLANETS
By
WILLY LEY

•

SEVEN DEADLY VIRTUES
By
PAUL FLEHR

And Other Stories



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ALL ORIGINAL STORIES

Galaxy SCIENCE FICTION

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Cover by WOOD showing not an atomic battlefield but firemen of 2025 A.D. fighting small industrial blasts from a distance of two hundred yards. Two blasts have been checked in mid-explosion and the third will be damped within microseconds. Experiments on "clean" bombs in previous century eliminated fallout hazard; all other effects are contained by instantaneous jamming that blanks out heat, radiation, concussion, protecting nearby communities.

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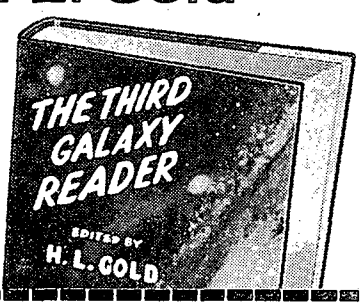

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TO MARRY MEDUSA

By THEODORE STURGEON

Problem: the human race is complex; answer: put the problem in a nutshell — and this was the organization that could do exactly that!

Illustrated by DILLON

"I'LL bus' your face, Al," said Gurlick. "I gon' break your back. I gon' blow up your place, an' you with it, an' all your rotgut licker, who wants it? You hear me, Al?"

Al didn't hear him. Al was back of the bar in his place three blocks away, probably still indignantly red, still twitching his long bald head at the empty doorway through which Gurlick had fled, still repeating what all his customers had just witnessed: Gurlick cringing in from the slick raw night, fawning at Al, stretching his stubble in a ragged brown grin, tilting his head, half-closing his sick-green, muddy-whited eyes.

"Walkin' in here," Al would be reporting for the fourth time in nine minutes, "all full of good-ol'-Al this an' hiya-buddy that, an' you-know-me-Al, and how's about a little *you*-know; an' all I says is I know you all right, Gurlick, shuck on out o' here, I wouldn't give you sand if I met you on the beach; an' him spittin' like that, right on the bar, an' runnin' out, an' stickin' his head back in an' callin' me a —"

Sanctimoniously, Al would not sully his lips with the word. And

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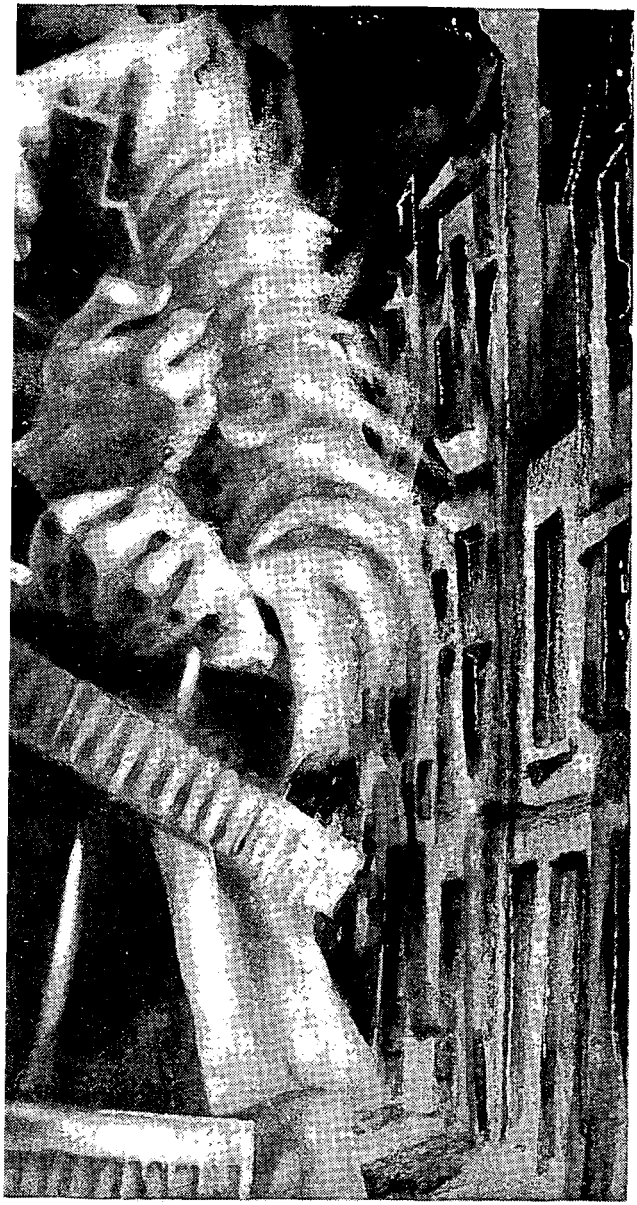

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the rye-and-bitters by the door would be nodding wisely and saying, "Man shouldn't mention a feller's mother, whatever," while the long-term beer would be clasping his glass, warm as pablum and headless as Ann Boleyn, and intoning, "You was right, Al, dead right."

Gurlick, four blocks away now, glanced back over his shoulder and saw no pursuit. He slowed his scamper to a trot and then a soggy shuffle, hunching his shoulders against the blowing mist. He kept on cursing Al, and the beer, and the rye-and-bitters, announcing that he could take 'em one at a time or all together one-handed.

He could do nothing of the kind, of course. It wasn't in him. It would have been success of a sort; and it was too late in life for Gurlick, unassisted, to start anything as new and different as success. His very first breath had been ill-timed and poorly done, and from then on he had done nothing right. He begged badly and stole when it was absolutely safe, which was seldom, and he rolled drunks providing they were totally blacked out, alone, and concealed. He slept in warehouses, boxcars, parked trucks. He worked only in the most extreme circumstances and had yet to last through the second week.

"I'll cut 'em," he muttered. "Smash their face for them . . ."

HE sidled into an alley and felt along the wall to a garbage can he knew about. It was a restaurant garbage can and sometimes . . .

He lifted the lid and, as he did so, saw something pale slide away and fall to the ground. It looked like a bun, and he snatched at it and missed. He stooped for it, and part of the misted wall beside him seemed to detach itself and become solid and hairy; it scrabbled past his legs. He gasped and kicked out, a vicious, ratlike spasm.

His foot connected solidly and the creature rose in the air and fell heavily at the base of the fence, in the dim wet light from the street. It was a small white dog, three-quarters starved. It yipped twice, faintly, tried to rise and could not.

When Gurlick saw it was helpless, he laughed aloud and kicked it and stamped on it until it was dead, and with each blow his vengeance became more mighty. There went Al, and there the two barflies, and one for the cops, and one for all judges and jailers, and a good one for everyone in the world who owned anything, and to top it, one for the rain.

He was a pretty big man by the time he was finished.

Out of breath, he wheezed back to the garbage can and felt around until he found the bun. It was sodden and slippery, but it was

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half a hamburger which some profligate had left unfinished, and that was all that mattered. He wiped it on his sleeve, which made no appreciable difference to sleeve or bun, and crammed it into his mouth.

He stepped out into the light and looked up through the mist at the square shoulders of the buildings that stood around to watch him. He was a man who had fought and killed for what was rightfully his.

"Don't mess with me," he growled at the city.

A kind of intoxication flooded him. He felt the way he did at the beginning of that dream he was always having, where he would walk down a dirt path beside a lake, feeling good, feeling strong and expectant, knowing he was about to come to the pile of clothes on the bank. He wasn't having the dream just then, he knew; he was too cold and too wet, but he squared his shoulders anyway. He began to walk, looking up. He told the world to look out. He said he was going to shake it up and dump it and stamp on its fat face.

"You gon' to know Dan Gurlick passed this way," he said.

He was perfectly right this time, because it was in him now.

IT had been in the hamburger and before that in the horse from which most of the hamburger had been made, and before that in two birds, one after the other, which had mistaken it for a berry. Before that . . . it's hard to say.

When the first bird ate it, it sensed it was in the wrong place, and did nothing, and the same thing with the second. When the horse's blunt club of a tongue scooped it up with a clutch of meadow-grass, it had hopes for a while. It straightened itself out after the horse's teeth flattened it, and left the digestive tract early, to shoulder its way between cells and fibers until it rested in a ganglion.

There it sensed another disappointment, and high time too — once it penetrated into the neurone-chains, its nature would be irreversibly changed, and it would have been with the horse for the rest of his life. As, in fact, it was, but after the butcher's blade missed it, and the meat-grinder wrung it, pinched it, stretched it (but in no way separated any part of it from any other), it could still go on about its job when the time came.

Eight months in the deep-freeze affected it not at all, nor did hot fat. The boy who bit into the resulting hamburger was the only human being who ever saw it. It looked like a boiled raisin, or worse. The boy said so and got another free and it was dumped atop the garbage can, to be found and fought for by Gurlick.

The rain came down hard. Gur-

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lick's exaltation faded, his shoulders hunched, his head went down. He slogged through the wet and soon sank to his usual level of feral misery. And there he stayed for a while.

THIS girl's name was Charlotte Dunsay and she worked in Accounting. She was open and sunny and she was a dish. She had rich brown hair with ruby lights in it, and the kind of topaz eyes that usually belong to a special kind of blonde. She had a figure that Paul Sanders, who was in Pharmaceuticals, considered a waste when viewed in the light of the information that her husband was a Merchant Marine officer on the Australia run. It was a matter of hours after she caught the attention of the entire plant (which was a matter of minutes after she got there) that news went around of her cheerful but unshakable "Thanks, but no, thanks."

Paul took this as an outright challenge, but he kept his distance and bided his time. When the water-cooler reported that her husband's ship had come off second best in a bout with the Great Barrier Reef and had limped to Hobart, Tasmania, for repairs, Paul decided that the day was upon him. He stated as much in the locker room and got good odds — 11 to 2 — and somebody to hold the money — one of the suckers who gave him the cue for the single strategic detail which so far had escaped him.

He had the time (Saturday night), the place (obviously her apartment, since she wouldn't go out), and the girl. All he had to figure out was how to put himself on the scene, and when one of the suckers said, "Nobody gets into that place but a for-real husband or a sick kitten," he had the answer.

This girl had cried when one of the boss's tropical fish was found belly-up one morning. She had rescued a praying mantis from an accountant who was flailing it against the window with the morning *Times*, and after she let the little green monster out, she had rescued the accountant's opinion of himself with a comforting word and a smile that put dazzle-spots all over his work for the rest of the afternoon.

So on Saturday night, late enough so he would meet few people in the halls, but early enough so she wouldn't be in bed yet, Paul Sanders stopped for a moment by a mirror in the hallway of her apartment house, regarded his rather startling appearance approvingly, winked at it, and then went to her door and began rapping softly and excitedly. He heard soft hurrying footsteps behind the door and began to breathe noisily, like someone trying not to sob.

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"Who is it? What's the matter?"

"Please," he moaned against the panel, "please, please, Mrs. Dunsay, help me!"

She immediately opened the door a peering inch. "Oh, thank God," he breathed and pushed hard. She sprang back with her hands on her mouth and he slid in and closed the door with his back. She was ready for bed, as he had hardly dared to hope. The robe was a little on the sensible side, but what he could see of the gown was fine, just fine.

He said hoarsely, "Don't let them get me!"

"Mr. *Sanders!*" Then she came closer, comforting, cheering. "No one's going to get you. You come on in and sit down until it's safe for you. Oh!" she gasped as he let his coat fall open, to reveal the shaggy rip and the bloodstain. "You're hurt!"

He gazed dully at the scarlet stain. Then he flung up his head and set his features in an approximation of those of the Spartan boy who denied all knowledge of a stolen fox while the fox, hidden under his toga, ate his entrails. He pulled his coat straight and buttoned it and smiled and said, "Just a scratch." Then he sagged, caught the doorknob behind him, straightened up, and again smiled. It was devastating.

"Oh — oh, come and sit down," she cried.

HE leaned heavily on her but kept his hands decent, and she got him to the sofa. She helped him off with his coat and his shirt. It was indeed only a scratch, and she didn't seem to find the amount of blood too remarkable. A couple of cc swiped from the plasma lab goes a long way on a white sport shirt.

He lay back limp and breathing shallowly while she flew to get scissors and bandages and warm water in a bowl, and averted his face from the light until she considerately turned it out in favor of a dim end-table lamp, and then he started the routine of not telling her his story because he was not fit to be here . . . she shouldn't know about such things . . . he'd been such a fool . . . and so on until she insisted that he could tell her anything, anything at all if it made him feel better.

So he asked her to drink with him before he told her because she surely wouldn't afterward, and she didn't have anything but some sherry, and he said that was fine. He emptied a vial from his pocket into his drink and managed to switch glasses with her, and when she tasted it, she frowned slightly and looked down into the glass, but by then he was talking a subdued, dark blue, convoluted streak that she must strain to hear and puzzle to follow.

In twenty minutes, he let it

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dwindle away to silence. She said nothing, but sat with slightly glazed eyes on her glass, which she held with both hands like a child afraid of spilling. He took it away from her and set it on the end table and took her pulse. It was slower than normal and a good deal stronger. He looked at the glass. It wasn't empty, but she'd had enough. He moved over close to her.

"How do you feel?"

She took seconds to answer, and then said slowly, "I feel . . ." Her lips opened and closed twice, and she shook her head slightly and was silent, staring out at him from topaz eyes gone all black.

"Charlotte . . . Lottie . . . lonely little Lottie. You're lonesome. You've been so alone. You need me, li'l Lottie," he crooned, watching her carefully.

When she did not move or speak, he took the sleeve of her robe in one hand and, moving steadily and slowly, tugged at it until her hand slipped inside. He untied the sash with his free hand and took her arm and drew it out of the robe.

"You don't need this now," he murmured. "You are warm, so warm . . . " He dropped the robe behind her and freed her other hand. She seemed not to understand what he was doing. The gown was nylon tricot.

He drew her slowly into his arms. She raised her hands to his chest as if to push him away but there seemed to be no strength in them. Her head came forward until her cheek rested softly against his. She spoke into his ear quietly, without any particular force or expression.

"I mustn't do this with you, Paul. Don't let me. Harry is the . . . there's never been anyone but him. There never must be. I'm . . . something's happened to me. Help me, Paul. Help me. If I do it with you, I can't live any more. I'm going to have to die if you don't help me now."

She didn't accuse him in any way.

Not once.

THE carcass of the old truck stood forgotten in the never visited back edge of a junkyard. Gurlick didn't visit it; he lived in it, more often than not. Sometimes the weather was too bitterly cold for it to serve him, and in the hottest part of the summer he stayed away from it for weeks at a time. But most of the time it served him well. It broke the wind and it kept out most of the rain; it was dirty and dark and cost-free, which three items made it pure Gurlick.

It was in this truck, two days after his encounter with the dog and the hamburger, that he was awakened from a deep sleep by . . . call it the Medusa.

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He had not been having his dream of the pile of clothes by the bank of the pool, and of how he would sit by them and wait, and then of how *she* would appear out there in the water, splashing and humming and not knowing he was there. Yet. This morning there seemed not to be room in his head for the dream nor for anything else, including its usual contents.

He made some grunts and a moan, and ground his stubby yellow teeth together, and rolled up to a sitting position and tried to squeeze his pressured head back into shape from the outside. It didn't help. He bent double and used his knees against his temples to squeeze even harder, and that didn't help either.

The head didn't hurt, exactly. And it wasn't what Gurlick occasionally called a "crazy" head. On the contrary, it seemed to contain a spacious, frigid and meticulous balance, a thing lying like a metrical lesion on the inner surface of his mind.

He felt himself almost capable of looking at the thing, but, for all that it was in his head, it existed in a frightening *direction,* and at first he couldn't bring himself to look that way.

BUT then the thing began to spread and grow, and in a few rocking, groaning moments there wasn't anything in his head *but* the new illumination, this opening casement which looked out upon two galaxies and part of a third, through the eyes and minds of countless billions of individuals, cultures, hives, gaggles, prides, bevies, braces, herds, races, flocks and other kinds and quantities of sets and groupings, complexes, systems and pairings for which the language has as yet no terms; living in states liquid, solid, gaseous and a good many others with combinations and permutations among and between; swimming, flying, crawling, burrowing, pelagic, rooted, awash; and variously belegged, ciliated and bewinged; with consciousness which could be called the skulk-mind, the crash-mind, the paddle—, exaltation—, spring—, or murmuration-mind, and other minds too numerous, too difficult, or too outrageous to mention.

And, over all, the central consciousness of the creature itself (though 'central' is misleading; the hive-mind is permeative) — the Medusa, the galactic man o' war, the superconscious of the illimitable beast, of which the people of a planet were here a nerve and there an organ, where entire cultures were specialized ganglia; the creature of which Gurlick was now a member and a part, for all that he was a minor atom in a simple molecule of a primitive cell — this mighty consciousness became aware of Gurlick and he of it.

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HE let himself regard it just long enough to know it was there, and then blanked ten-elevenths of his mind away from the very idea. If you set before Gurlick a page of the writings of Immanuel Kant, he would see it; he might even be able to read a number of the words. But he wouldn't spend any time or effort over it. He would see it and discard it from his attention, and if you left it in front of him, or held it there, he would see without looking and wait for it to go away.

Now, in its seedings, the Medusa had dropped its wrinkled milt into many a fantastic fossa. And if one of those scattered spores survived at all, it survived in, and linked with, the person and the species in which it found itself.

If the host-integer was a fish, then a fish it would remain, acting as a fish, thinking as a fish; and when it became a "person" (which is what biologists call the individual polyps which make up the incrédible colonies we call hydromedusae), it would *not* put away fishly things. On the contrary; it was to the interest of the Medusa that it keep its manifold parts specialized in the media in which they had evolved; the fish not only remained a fish, but in many cases might become much more so.

Therefore, in inducting Gurlick into itself, in the unequal interflow of itself into Gurlick and Gurlick into itself, he remained — just Gurlick.

What Gurlick saw of the Medusa's environment(s), he would not look at. What the Medusa sensed was only what Gurlick could sense, and (regrettably for our pride of species) Gurlick himself. It could not, as might be supposed, snatch out every particle of Gurlick's information and experience, nor could it observe Gurlick's world in any other way than through the man's own eye and mind. Answers there might be, in that rotted repository, to the questions the Medusa asked, but they were unavailable until Gurlick himself formulated them.

This had always been a slow process with him. He thought verbally, and his constructions were put together at approximately oral speed. The end effect was extraordinary; the irresistible demands came arrowing into him from immensity, crossing light-years with considerably less difficulty than it found in traversing Gurlick's thin, tough layer of subjective soft-focus, of not-caring, not-understanding-nor-wanting-to-understand. But reach him they did, the mighty unison of voice with which the super-creature conveyed ideas... and were answered in Gurlick's own time, in his own way, and aloud in his own words.

And so it was that this scrubby, greasy, rotten-toothed near-illiter-

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ate in the filthy clothes raised his face to the dim light, and responded to the demand-for-audience of the most majestic, complex, resourceful and potent intellect in all the known universe: "Okay, *okay*. So whaddaya want?"

GURLICK was not afraid. Incredible as this might seem, it must be realized that he was now a member, a person of the creature; part of it. He no more thought to fear it than a finger might fear a rib. But at the same time his essential Gurlickness was intact — or, as has been pointed out, possibly more so. So he knew that something he could not comprehend wanted to do something through him of which he was incapable, and would unquestionably berate him because it had not been done . . .

But this was *Gurlick!* This kind of thing could hold no fears and no surprises for Gurlick. Bosses, cops, young drunks and barkeeps had done just this to Gurlick all his life! And "Okay, *okay!* So whaddaya want?" was his invariable response, not only to a simple call, but also, and infuriatingly, to detailed orders. They had then to repeat their orders, or perhaps they would throw up their hands and walk away, or kick him and walk away. More often than not, the demand was disposed of, whatever it was, at this point, and that was worth a kick any time.

The Medusa would not give up. Gurlick would not listen, and would not listen, and . . . had to listen, and took the easiest way out, and subsided to resentful seething — as always, as ever for him. It is doubtful that anyone else on Earth could have found himself so quickly at home with the invader. In this very moment of initial contact, he was aware of the old familiar response of anyone to a first encounter with him—a disgusted astonishment, a surge of unbelief, annoyance, and dawning frustration.

"So whaddaya want?"

The Medusa told him what it wanted, incredulously, as one explaining the utter and absolute obvious, and drew a blank from Gurlick. There was a moment of disbelief and then a forceful repetition of the demand.

And Gurlick still did not understand. Few humans would, for not many have made the effort to comprehend the nature of the hive-mind — what it must be like to have such a mind, and further, to be totally ignorant of the fact that any other kind of mind could exist.

For in all its eons of being, across and back and through and through the immensities of space it occupied, the Medusa had never encountered intelligence except as a phenomenon of the group. It was

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aware of the almost infinite variations in kind and quality of the *gestalt* psyche, but so fused in its experience and comprehension were the concepts "intelligence" and "group" that it was genuinely incapable of regarding them as separable things. That a single entity of any species was capable of so much as lucid thought without the operation of group mechanisms was outside its experience and beyond its otherwise near-omniscience. To contact any individual of a species was—or had been until now — to contact the entire species.

NOW it pressed against Gurlick, changed its angle and pressed again, paused to ponder, came back again and, puzzling, yet again to do the exploratory, bewildered things a man might do, faced with the opening of and penetration through some artifact he did not understand.

There were tappings and listenings, and (analogously) pressures this way and that, as if to find a left-hand thread. There were scrapings as for samples to analyze, proddings and pricks as for hardness tests, polarized rayings as if to determine lattice structures. And in the end there was a — call it a pressure test, the procedure one applies to clogged tubing or to oxide-shorts on shielded wire: blow it out. Take what's supposed to be going through and cram an excess down it.

Gurlick sat on the floor of the abandoned truck, disinterestedly aware of the distant cerebration, computation, discussion and conjecture. A lot of gabble by someone who knew more than he did about things he didn't understand. Like always.

Uh!

It had been a thing without sight or sound or touch, but it struck like all three, suffused him for a moment with some unbearable tension, and then receded and left him limp and shaken. Some mighty generator somewhere had shunted in and poured its product to him, and it did a great many things inside him somehow; and all of them hurt, and none was what was wanted.

He was simply not the right conduit for such a force. He was a solid bar fitted into a plumbing system, a jet of air tied into an electrical circuit; he was the wrong material in the wrong place and the output end wasn't hooked up to anything at all.

Spectacular, the degree of mystification which now suffused the Medusa. For ages untold, there had always been some segment somewhere which could come up with an answer to anything; now there was not.

That particular jolt of that particular force ought to have ex-

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ploded into the psyche of every rational being on Earth, forming a network of intangible, unbreakable threads leading to Gurlick and through him to Medusa itself. It had always happened that way — not almost always, but always. This was how the creature expanded. Not by campaign, attack, siege, consolidation, conquest, but by contact and influx. Its "spores," if they encountered any life-form which the Medusa could not control, simply did not function. If they functioned, the Medusa flowed in. *Always.*

From methane swamp to airless rock, from sun to sun through two galaxies and part of a third flickered the messages, sorting, combining, test-hypothesizing, calculating, extrapolating. And these flickerings began to take on the hue of fear. The Medusa had never known fear before.

TO be thus checked meant that the irresistible force was resisted, the indefensible was guarded. Earth had a shield, and a shield is the very next thing to a weapon. It *was* a weapon, in the Medusa's lexicon; for expansion was a factor as basic to its existence as Deity to the religious, as breath or heartbeat to a single animal; such a factor may not, must not be checked.

Earth suddenly became a good deal more than just another berry for the mammoth to sweep in. Humanity now had to be absorbed, by every measure of principle, of gross ethic, of life.

And it must be done through Gurlick, for the action of the "spore" within him was irreversible, and no other human could be affected by it. The chances of another being in the same sector at the same time were too remote to justify waiting, and Earth was physically too remote from the nearest Medusa-dominated planet to allow for an attack in force or even an exploratory expedition, whereby expert mind might put expert hands (or palps or claws or tentacles or cilia or mandibles) to work in the field.

No, it had to be done through Gurlick, who might be — must be — manipulated by thought emanations, which are non-physical and thereby exempt from physical laws, capable of skipping across a galaxy and back before a light-ray can travel a hundred yards.

Even while, after that blast of force, Gurlick slumped and scrabbled dazedly after his staggering consciousness, and as he slowly rolled over and got to his knees, grunting and pressing his head, the Medusa was making a thousand simultaneous computations and setting up ten thousand more. From the considerations of a space-traveling culture deep in the Coalsack Nebula came a thought in the

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form of a speculative analogy:

As a defense against thick concentrations of cosmic dust, these creatures had designed spaceships which, on approaching a cloud, broke up into hundreds of small streamlined parts which would come together and reunite when the danger was past. Could that be what humanity had done? Had they a built-in mechanism, like the chipmunk's tail, the sea-cucumber's ejectible intestines, which would fragment the hive-mind on contact from outside, break it up into two and a half billion specimens like this Gurlick?

It seemed reasonable. In its isolation as the only logical hypothesis conceivable by the Medusa, it seemed so reasonable as to be a certainty.

How could it be undone then and humanity's total mind restored? Therein lay the Medusa's answer. Unify humanity (it thought: *re*-unify humanity) and the only problem left would be that of influx. If that influx could not be done through Gurlick directly, other ways might be found; it had never met a hive-mind yet that it couldn't enter.

Gasping, Gurlick grated, "Try that again, you gon' kill me, you hear?"

COLDLY examining what it could of the mists of his mind, the Medusa weighed that statement and doubted it. On the other hand, Gurlick was, at the moment, infinitely valuable. It now knew that he could be hurt, and organisms which can be hurt can be driven. It realized also that Gurlick might be more useful, however, if he could be enlisted.

To enlist an organism, you find out what it wants and give it a little in a way that indicates promise of more. It asked Gurlick then what he wanted.

"Lea'me alone," Gurlick said.

The response to that was a flat negative, with a faint stirring of that wrenching, explosive force it had already used. Gurlick whimpered, and the Medusa asked him again.

"What do I want?" whispered Gurlick. He ceased, for the moment, to use words, but the concepts were there. They were hate and smashed faces, and the taste of liquor, and a pile of clothes by the bank of a pond: she saw him sitting there and was startled; then she smiled and said, Hello, Handsome. What did he *want?* . . .

The Medusa at this point had some considerable trouble interrupting. Gurlick, on the subject of what Gurlick wanted, could go on with surprising force for a very long time. The Medusa found it possible to understand this resentment, surely the tropistic flailing of something amputated, something denied full function, robbed, de-

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prived. And, of course, insane.

Deftly, the Medusa began making promises. The rewards were described vividly indeed, and in detail that enchanted Gurlick. They were subtly implanted feedback circuits from his own imaginings and they dazzled him. And from time to time there was a faint prod from that which had hurt him, just to remind him that it was still there.

At last, "Oh, sure, sure," Gurlick said. "I'll find out about that, about how people can get put together again. An' then, boy, I gon' step on their face."

So it was, chuckling, that Daniel Gurlick went forth from his wrecked truck to conquer the world.

DIMITY Carmichael sat back and smiled at the weeping girl. "Sex," she told Caroline, "is, after all, so *unnecessary*."

Caroline knelt on the rug with her face hidden in the couch cushion, her nape bright red from weeping, the end strands of her hair wet with tears.

She had come unexpectedly, in mid-afternoon, and Dimity Carmichael had opened the door and almost screamed. She had caught the girl before she could fall, led her to the couch. When Caroline could speak, she muttered about a dentist, about how it had hurt, how she had been so sure she could make it home but was just too sick, and, finding herself here, had hoped Dimity would let her lie down for a few minutes . . .

Dimity had made her comfortable and then, with a few sharp unanswerable questions ("What dentist? What is his name? Why couldn't you lie down in his office? He wanted you out of there as soon as he'd finished, didn't he? In fact, he wasn't a dentist and he didn't do the kind of operations dentists do, isn't that so?") she had reduced the pale girl to this sodden, sobbing thing huddled against the couch. "I've known for a long time how you were carrying on. And you finally got caught."

It was at that point, after thinking it out in grim, self-satisfied silence, that Dimity Carmichael said sex was, after all, so unnecessary. "It certainly has done you no good. Why did you give in, Caroline? You didn't have to."

"I did, I did . . . "

"Nonsense. Say you wanted to and we'd be closer to the truth. No one *has* to."

Caroline said something — "I love (or loved) him so," or some such. Dimity sniffed. "Love, Caroline, isn't *that*. Love is everything else there can be between a man and a woman, without *that*."

Caroline sobbed.

"That's your test, you see," explained Dimity Carmichael. "We are human beings because there

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are communions between us which are not experienced by — by rabbits, we'll say. If a man is willing to make some great sacrifice for a woman, it might be a proof of love. Considerateness, chivalry, kindness, patience, the sharing of great books and fine music — these are the things that prove a *man*. It is hardly a demonstration of manhood for a man to prove himself merely as capable as a rabbit."

Caroline shuddered. Dimity Carmichael smiled tightly. Caroline spoke.

"What? What's that?"

Caroline turned her cheek to rest it in her clenching hand. Her eyes were squeezed closed. "I said . . . I just can't see it the way you do. I can't."

"You'd be a lot happier if you did."

"I know, I know . . ." Caroline sobbed.

Dimity Carmichael leaned forward. "You can, if you like. Even after the kind of life you've lived — oh, I know how you were playing with the boys from the time you were twelve years old — but that can all be wiped away, and this will never bother you again. If you'll let me help you."

CAROLINE shook her head exhaustedly. It was not a refusal, but instead doubt, despair.

"Of course I can," said Dimity, as if Caroline had spoken her doubts aloud. "You just do as I say."

She waited until the girl's shoulders were still, until she lifted her head away from the couch, turned to sit on her calves, looked sidewise up at Dimity from the corners of her long eyes. "Do what?" Caroline asked forlornly.

"Tell me what happened — everything."

"You know what happened."

"You don't understand. I don't mean this afternoon — that was a consequence and we needn't dwell on it. I want the cause. I want to know exactly what happened to get you into this."

"I won't tell you his name."

"His name," said Dimity Carmichael, "is legion. I don't care about that. What I want you to do is to describe to me exactly what happened, in every last detail, to bring you to *this*," and she waved a hand at the girl, and her "dentist," and all the parts of her predicament.

"Oh," said Caroline faintly. Suddenly she blushed. "I—I can't be sure just wh-which time it was."

"That doesn't matter either," said Dimity flatly. "Pick your own. For example, the first time with this latest one. All right? Now tell me what happened — every last little detail, from second to second."

Caroline turned her face into the upholstery again. "Oh . . . why?"

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"You'll see." She waited for a time, and then said, "Well?" and again, "Look, Caroline, we'll peel away the sentiment, the bad judgment, the illusions and delusions, and leave you free. As I am free. You will see for yourself what it is to be that free."

Caroline closed her eyes, making two red welts where the lids met. "I don't know where to begin . . ."

"At the beginning. You had been somewhere — a dance, a club?"

"A . . . a drive-in."

"And then he took you—"

"Home. His house."

"Go on."

"We got there and had another drink and — it happened, that's all."

"*What* happened?"

"Oh, I can't, I can't talk about it! Don't you see?"

"I don't see. This is an emergency, Caroline. You do as I tell you. Just talk." She paused and then said quietly, "You got to his house."

THE girl looked up at her with one searching, pleading look, and, staring down at her hands, began speaking rapidly. Dimity Carmichael bent close to listen, and let her go on for a minute, then stopped her. "You have to say exactly how it was. Now — this was in the parlor."

"L-living room."

"Living room. You have to see it all again — drapes, pictures, everything. The sofa was in front of the fireplace, is that right?"

Caroline haltingly described the room, with Dimity repeating, expanding, insisting. Sofa here, fireplace there, table with drinks, window, door, easy chair. How warm, how large, what do you mean red, *what* red were the drapes? "Begin again so I can see it."

More swift, soft speech, more interruption. "You wore what?"

"The black faille with the velvet trim and that neckline, you know—"

"Which has the zipper—"

"In the back."

"Go on."

After a time, Dimity stopped her with a hand on her back. "Get up off the floor. I can't hear you. Get up, girl." Caroline rose and sat on the couch. "No, no; lie down. Lie down," Dimity whispered.

Caroline lay down and put her forearms across her eyes. It took a while to get started again, but at last she did. Dimity drew up an ottoman and sat on it, close, watching the girl's mouth.

"Don't say *it*," she said at one point. "There are names for these things. Use them."

"Oh, I — just *couldn't*."

"Use them."

Caroline used them.

"But what were you feeling all this time?"

"F-feeling?"

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"Exactly."

Caroline tried.

"And did you say anything while this was going on?"

"No, nothing. Except—"

"Well?"

"Just at first," whispered the girl. She moved and was still again, and her concealing arms clamped visibly tighter against her eyes. "I think I went . . ." and her teeth met, her lips curled back, her breath hissed in sharply.

DIMITY Carmichael's lips curled back and she clenched her teeth and sharply drew in her breath. "Like that?"

"Yes."

"Go on. Did he say anything?"

"No. Yes. Yes, he said, 'Caroline, Caroline, Caroline,'" she crooned.

"Go on."

She went on. Dimity listened, watching. She saw the girl smiling and the tears that pressed out through the juncture of forearm and cheek. She watched the faint flickering of white-edged nostrils. She watched the breast in its rapid motion, not quite like that which would result from running up stairs, because of the shallow shiver each long inhalation carried, the second's catch and hold, the gasping release.

"Ah-h-h-h-h!" Caroline screamed suddenly, softly. "Ahh . . . I thought he loved me! I did think he loved me!" She wept. "That's all . . ."

"No, it isn't. You had to leave, get ready to leave. Hm? What did he say? What did you say?"

Finally, when Caroline said, ". . . and that's all," there were no questions to ask. Dimity Carmichael rose and picked up the ottoman and placed it carefully where it belonged by the easy chair, and sat down. The girl had not moved.

"Now how do you feel?"

Slowly the girl took down her arms and lay looking at the ceiling. She wet her lips and let her head fall to the side so she could look at Dimity Carmichael, composed in the easy chair — a chair not too easy, but comfortable for one who liked a flat seat and a straight back. The girl searched Dimity Carmichael's face, looking apparently for shock, confusion, anger, disgust. She found none of these, nothing but thin lips, dry skin, cool eyes.

Answering at last, she said, "I feel . . . awful." She waited, but Dimity Carmichael had nothing to say. She sat up painfully and covered her face with her hands. She said, "Telling it was making it happen all over again, almost real. But—"

Again a silence.

"—but it was like . . . doing it in front of somebody else. In front of—"

"In front of me?"

"Yes, but not exactly."

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"You did do it in front of someone — yourself. You will never be in such a situation again," Dimity Carmichael intoned, her voice returning and returning to the same note like some soft insistent buzzer, "without hearing yourself tell it, every detail, every sight and sound of it, to someone else. Except that the happening and the telling won't be weeks apart, like this time. They'll be simultaneous."

"But the telling makes it all so... cheap, almost . . . funny!"

"It isn't the telling that makes it that way. The act is itself ridiculous, ungraceful, altogether too trivial for the terrible price one pays for it. Now you can see it as I see it; now you will be unable to see it any other way. Go wash your face."

SHE did, and came back looking much better, with her hair combed and the furrows gone from her brows and the corners of her long eyes. With the last of her makeup gone, she looked even younger than usual; to think she was actually two years older than Dimity Carmichael was incredible, incredible . . .

She slipped on her jacket and took up her topcoat and handbag. "I'm going. I — feel a lot better. I mean about . . . things."

"It's just that you're beginning to feel as I do about . . . things."

"Oh!" Caroline cried from the door, from the depths of her troubles, her physical and mental agonies, the hopeless complexity of simply trying to live through what life presented. "Oh, I wish I was like you! I wish I'd always been like you!" And she went out.

Dimity Carmichael sat for a long time in the not-quite-easy chair with her eyes closed. Then she rose and went into the bedroom and began to take off her clothes. She needed a bath; she felt proud. She had a sudden recollection of her father's face showing a pride like this. He had gone down into the cesspool to remove a blockage when nobody else would do it. It had made him quite sick, but when he came up, unspeakably filthy and every nerve screaming for a scalding bath, it had been with that kind of pride.

Mama had not understood that nor liked it. She would have borne the unmentionable discomforts of the blocked sewer indefinitely rather than have it known even within the family that Daddy had been so soiled. Well, that's the way Daddy was. That's the way Mama was. The episode somehow crystallized the great difference between them, and why Mama had been so glad when he died, and how it was that Dimity's given name — given by him — was one which reflected all the luminance of wickedness and sin, and why Salome Carmichael came to be

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known as Dimity from the day he died. No cesspools for her. Clean, crisp was little Dimity, decent, pleated, skirted and cozy all her life.

To get from her bedroom into the adjoining bath — seven steps — she bundled up in the long robe. Once the shower was adjusted to her liking, she hung up the robe and stepped under the cleansing flood. She kept her gaze, like her thoughts, directed upward as she soaped.

THE detailed revelation she had extracted from Caroline flashed through her mind, all of it, in a second, but with no detail missing. She smiled at the whole disgusting affair with a cool detachment. In the glass door of the shower stall, scattering of hairs, the strong square clean yellow teeth.
she saw the ghost-reflection of her face, the coarse-fleshed, broad nose, the heavy chin with its random

I wish I was like you! I wish I'd always been like you! Caroline had said that, slim-waisted, full-breasted Caroline, Caroline with the mouth which, in relaxation, pouted to *kiss me,* Caroline with the skin of a peach, whose eyes were long jewels of a rare cut, whose hair was fine and glossy and inwardly ember-radiant. *I wish I was like you . . .*

Could Caroline have known that Dimity Carmichael had yearned all her life for those words spoken that way by Caroline's kind of woman? For were they not the words Dimity herself repressed as she turned the pages of magazines, watched the phantoms on the stereophonic, technicolored, wide deep unbearable screen?

It was time now for the best part of the shower, the part Dimity looked forward to most. She put her hand on the control and let it rest there, ecstatically delaying the transcendant moment.

. . . *be like you* . . . perhaps Caroline would, one day, with luck. How good not to *need* all that, how fine and clear everything was without it! How laughingly revolting, to have a man prove the power of a rabbit's preoccupations with his animal strugglings and his breathy croonings of one's name, "Salome, Salome, Salome . . ." (I mean, she corrected herself suddenly and with a shade of panic, Caroline, Caroline, Caroline.)

In part because it was time, and part because of a swift suspicion that her thoughts were gaining a momentum beyond her control and a direction past her choice, she threw the control hard over to *Cold,* and braced her whole mind and body for that clean (surely sexless) moment of total sensation by which she punctuated her entire existence.

As the liquid fire of cold enveloped her, the lips of Dimity

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Carmichael turned back, the teeth met, the breath was drawn in with a sharp, explosive hiss.

GURLICK sank his chin into his collarbones, hunched his shoulders, and shuffled. "I'll find out," he promised, muttering. "You jus' let me know what you want, I'll find out f'ya. Then, boy, look out."

At the corner, sprawled out on the steps of an abandoned candy store, he encountered what at first glance seemed to be an odorous bundle of rags. He was about to pass it when he stopped. Or was stopped.

"It's on'y Freddy," he said disgustedly. "He don't know nothin' hardly."

"Gah dime bo?" asked the bundle, stirring feebly, and extending a filthy hand which flowered on the stem of an impossibly thin wrist.

"Well, sure I said somebody oughta know," growled Gurlick, "but not him, f'godsakes."

"Gha dime bo? Oh . . . It's Danny. Got a dime on ya, Danny?"

"All right, all right, I'll ast 'im!" said Gurlick angrily, and at last turned to Freddy. "Shut up, Freddy. You know I ain't got no dime. Listen, I wanna ast you somethin.' How could we get all put together again?"

Freddy made an effort which he had apparently not considered worth while until now: he focused his eyes. "Who — you and me? What you mean, put together?"

"I *tole* you!" said Gurlick, not speaking to Freddy; then, at the mingled presssure of threat and promise, he whimpered in exasperation and said, "Just tell me can we do it or not, Freddy."

"What's the matter with you, Danny?"

"You gon' tell me or aincha?"

Freddy blinked palely and seemed on the verge of making a mental effort. Finally he said, "I'm cold. I been cold for three years. You got a drink on you, Danny?"

There wasn't anybody around, so Gurlick kicked him. "Jerk," he said, tucked his chin down, and shuffled away. Freddy watched him for a while, until his gritty lids got too heavy to hold up.

Two blocks further, Gurlick saw somebody else and tried to cross the street. He was not permitted to. "No!" he begged. "No, no, no! You can't ast every single one you see." Whatever he was told, it was said in no uncertain terms, because he whined, "You gon' get me in big trouble, jus' you wait."

Ask he must; ask he did. The plumber's wife, who stood a head taller than he and weighed twice as much, stopped sweeping her stone steps as he shuffled toward her, head still down but eyes up, and obviously not going to scuttle past as his kind usually did.

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He stopped before her, looking up. She would tower over him if he stood on a box; as it was, he was on the sidewalk and she on the second step. He regarded her like a country cousin examining a monument. She looked down at him with the nauseated avidity of a witness to an automobile accident.

He put a hand on the side of his head and screwed up his eyes. The hand fell away; he gazed at her and croaked, "How can we get put together again?"

It seemed a long noisy while before the immense capacity of her lungs was exhausted by her first great ring of laughter, but when it was over, it brought her face down again, which served only to grant her another glimpse of Gurlick's anxious filthy face, and caused another paroxysm.

HE left her laughing and headed for the park. Numbly he cursed the woman and all women, and all their husbands, and all their forebears and descendants.

Into the park the young spring had brought slim grass, treebuds, dogs, children, old people and a hopeful ice-cream vendor. The peace of these beings was leavened by a scattering of adolescents who had found the park on such a day more attractive than school, and it was three of these who swarmed into Gurlick's irresolution as he stood just inside the park, trying to find an easy way to still the demand inside his head.

"Dig the creep," said the one with HEROES on the back of his jacket, and another: "Or-*bit!*" and the three began to circle Gurlick, capering like stage Indians, holding fingers out from their heads and shrilling "Bee-beep! Bee-beep" satellite signals.

Gurlick turned back and forth for a moment like a weathervane in a williwaw, trying to sort them out. "Giddada year," he growled.

"Bee-beep!" screamed one of the satellites. "Stand by fer re-*yentry!*" The capering became a gallop as the orbits closed, swirled around him in a shouting blur, and at the signal "Burnout!" they stopped abruptly and the one behind Gurlick dropped to his hands and knees while the other two pushed. Gurlick hit the ground with a whoosh, flat on his back with his arms and legs in the air. Around the scene, one woman cried out indignantly, one old man's mouth popped open with shock, and everyone else, everyone else, laughed and laughed.

"Giddada year," gasped Gurlick, trying to roll over and get his knees under him.

One of the boys solicitously helped him to his feet, saying to another, "Now, Rocky, ya shoonta. Ya shoonta." When the trembling Gurlick was upright and the sec-

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ond of the trio — the "Hero" — down on hands and knees behind him again, the solicitous one gave another push and down went Gurlick again. Gurlick, now dropping his muffled pretenses of threat and counterattack, lay whimpering without trying to rise. Everybody laughed and laughed, all but two, and they didn't do anything. Except move closer, which attracted more laughers.

"Space Patrol! Space Patrol," yelled Rocky, pointing at the approaching blue uniform. "Four o'clock high!"

"Ess-*cape* velocity!" one of them barked; and with their antenna-fingers clamped to their heads and a chorus of shrill *bee-beeps*, they snaked through the crowd and were gone.

"Bastits. Lousy bastits. I'll kill-um, the lousy bastits," Gurlick wept.

"Ah right. *Ah* right! Break it up. Move along. Ah right," said the policeman. The crowd broke it up immediately ahead of him and moved along sufficiently to close the gap behind, craning in gap-mouthed anticipation of another laugh . . . laughter makes folks feel good.

The policeman found Gurlick on all fours and jerked him to his feet, a good deal more roughly than Rocky had done. "Ah right, you, what's the matter with you?"

The indignant lady pushed through and said something about hoodlums. "Oh," said the policeman, "hoodlum, are ye?"

"Lousy bastits," Gurlick sobbed.

The policeman quelled the indignant lady in mid-protest with a bland, "Ah right, don't get excited, lady; I'll handle this. What you got to say about it?" he demanded of Gurlick.

GURLICK, half suspended from the policeman's hard fist, whimpered and put his hands to his head. Suddenly nothing around him, no sound, no face, pressed upon him more than that insistence inside. "I don't care there *is* lotsa people, don't make me ast now!"

"What'd you say?" demanded the policeman truculently.

"Okay, okay!" Gurlick cried to the Medusa, and to the policeman: "All I want is, tell me how we c'n get put together again."

"What?"

"All of us," said Gurlick. "Everybody in the world."

"He's talking about world peace," said the indignant woman. There was laughter. Someone explained to someone else that the bum was afraid of the Communists. Someone else heard that and explained to the man behind him that Gurlick was a Communist. The policeman heard part of that and shook Gurlick. "Don't you go shootin' your mouth off around here, or it's the cooler for you."

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Gurlick sniveled and mumbled, "Yessir, yessir," and sidled cringing away.

"Ah right. Move along. Show's over. Ah right, there . . ."

Gurlick ran. He was out of breath before he began to run, so his wind lasted him only to the edge of the park, where he reeled against the railing and clung there to whimper his breath back again. He stood with his hands over his face, his fingers trying to press back at that thing inside him, his mouth open and noisy with self-pity and anoxia. A hand fell on his shoulder and he jumped wildly.

"It's all right," said the indignant woman. "I just wanted to let you know everybody in the whole world isn't cruel and mean."

Gurlick looked at her, working his mouth. She was in her fifties, round-shouldered, bespectacled and most earnest. She said, "You go right on thinking about world peace. Talking about it, too."

He was not yet capable of speaking. He gulped air.

"You poor man." She fumbled in an edge-flaked patent leather pocketbook and found a quarter. She held it and sighed as if it were an heirloom, and handed it to him. He took it unnoticing and put it away. He did not thank her. He asked, "Do you know?" He pressed his temples in that newly developed compulsive gesture. "I got to find out, see? I got to."

"Find out what?"

"How people can get put back together again."

"Oh," she said. "Oh, dear." She mulled it over. "I'm afraid I don't know just what you mean."

"Y'see?" he informed his inner tormentor, agonized. "Ain't nobody knows — nobody!"

"Please explain it a little," the woman begged. "Maybe there's *some*one who can help you, if I can't."

Gurlick said hopelessly, "It's about people's brains, see what I mean, how to make all the brains go together again."

"Oh, you poor man . . ." She looked at him pityingly, clearly certain that his brains indeed needed putting together again, and *Well, at least he realizes it, which is a sight more than most of us do.* "I know! Dr. Langley's the man for you. I clean for him once a week, and believe me, if you want to know somebody who knows about the brain, he's the one. He has a machine that draws wiggly lines and he can read them and tell what you're thinking."

Gurlick's vague visualization of such a device flashed out to the stars, where it had an electrifying effect. "Where's it at?"

"The machine? Right there in his office. He'll tell you all about it; he's such a dear, kind man. He told me all about it, though I'm afraid I didn't quite—"

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"Where's it *at?*"

"Why, in his office. Oh, you mean where. Well, it's 13 Deak Street, on the second floor. Look, you can almost see it from here. Right there where the house with the—"

Without another word, Gurlick put down his chin and hunched his shoulders and scuttled off.

"Oh, dear," murmured the woman worriedly, "I do hope he doesn't bother Dr. Langley too much. But then he wouldn't; he *does* believe in peace." She turned away from her good deed and started home.

Gurlick did not bother Dr. Langley for long, and he did indeed bring him peace.

THERE was a mad boy in Rome, and an angry warrior in Africa whose yams were being stolen at night, and there was the thief who stole them. All over the world people, with all their hearts, did the difficult things they must do to be human beings, and learned what they had to learn, paying what it cost them. Two and three-quarter billions . . . two and three-quarter billion subjective planets, some circling close to each other and to light, and others far out and cold in the lonely dark; but all separate, isolated, discrete. Commissar, peasant, potentate, the children, the old ones, the insane, the underprivileged — each basically alone.

Guido, the boy in Rome, had been born during the fighting at Anzio, and was found by an UNRRA team a year and a half later, living with some wild children, maggoting the bones of the ruined town. He was full of music, to a degree notable even in a country full of music. Before he could talk, he could whistle, and he would whistle any music he heard after one hearing. In the shuffle of souls that followed, he was taken in by a Corfu shepherd who, in the next ten years, kicked the music out of the boy, or perhaps he kicked it down.

The shepherd was a smuggler, and though he needed the boy's strong back and hard hands, he wanted nothing near him which might attract attention. Guido dared not utter a phrase of music, not a note. The shepherd developed a high skill in detection; he could be aware of music welling up in the boy before Guido himself knew of it, and would knock him down and kick him and his unborn melodies. And when the association between music and punishment was strong enough, there was no more music from the boy — and too much unkillably, unquellably inside him.

After the shepherd died, Guido turned into something not quite human. He committed a series of ingenious nuisances which for a long time were lost in the seeth of

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the city, unconnected as they seemed to be with each other. He smashed some stained-glass windows, and he broke the leg of a beggar over a curbstone; he took a toy from a child and threw it into the river; he vandalized a print shop.

And at last a detective with rather more sight, more insight than most found the thread upon which was strung these episodes; for the stained glass was one of the windows of the Chapel of the Annunciation, and choir practice was in session; the beggar was one who sang for his supper; the child's toy was a harmonica; the print shop was printing sheet music. The detective contrived to give Guido a violin, and there was, for Guido, a burst of light, and would be, in time, a very explosion of music from him . . .

AND the warrior, Mbala, began to guard his yam patch at night, which was by custom the duty of his dead father, as Mbala would one day die and then guard the yam patch of his sons. But Mbala's faith in this old belief was shaken, for all he could agree that his father was supposed to guard against devils, not against men, and it was manifestly a man who was stealing the yams.

The thief, Nuyu, had once had faith in such beliefs too, but he no longer believed in anything at all but his own clever hands.

They were, in their own theology, Mbala and Nuyu, backslider and atheist respectively.

And one night, while Mbala watched and Nuyu hid, waiting him out, there came from the sky a floating, glowing sphere. It sank to the edge of the yam patch and, not quite touching the ground, slowly circled the field; and where it had passed, the thick tangle of bush which surrounded the cultivated land was cleared away, and in its place a thin drift of white, cold material which changed to water in a minute or two.

Now it happened that the sphere was an untenanted and automatic machine, and that the weed it harvested and processed was astralagous vetch, which has a high affinity for selenium, and the builders of the machine needed all the selenium they could get.

But to Nuyu the thief, who was hiding in the vetch at the time, this was retribution not only for his current sins, but all his past ones, cast as it was in the strange figure of a spirit guarding the yams — shades of his childhood legends, so long laughed away!

And to Mbala, this was his father, not only discovering the thief (who came howling and gibbering to huddle in contrite terror against Mbala) but at the same time clearing more land for him.

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After the sphere was gone, falling upward and away to the north (where it had detected another stand of vetch), Mbala did not, as he had earlier intended, kill his thief. Instead, they returned to the village, companions in revelation, each at the peak of a species of that rare ecstasy, the religious experience: one confirmed, the other converted.

THESE WERE people, these are anecdotes dwelt upon for their element of the extraordinary. But each man alive has such a story, unique unto himself, of what is in him and of its molding by the forces around him, and of his interpretations of those forces. Here a man sees a machine as a god, and there a man sees a god as a mere kind of angry argument; and another uses the angry argument of others quite as if it were a machine. Yet for all his ability to work in concert with his fellows, and to induce some sympathy in their vibrations, he remains isolated; no one knows exactly how another feels.

At the very climax of sensation, Man approaches unconsciousness . . . unconsciousness of what? Why, of all around him; never of himself.

"YOU Doctor Langley?"

The doctor said, "Good God."

Dear, kind man he might be to his cleaning lady, but to Gurlick he was just another clean man full of knowledges and affairs which Gurlick wouldn't understand, plus the usual, foreseeable anger, disgust and intolerance Gurlick stimulated wherever he went. In short, just another one of the bastits to hate.

Gurlick said, "You know about brains."

The doctor said, "Who sent you here?"

"You know what to do to put people's brains together again."

"What? Who are you? What do you want anyway?"

"Look," said Gurlick, "I got to find this out, see. You know how to do it or not?"

"I'm afraid," said the doctor icily, "that I can't answer a question I don't understand."

"So ya *don't* know anything about brains."

The doctor sat tall behind a wide desk. His face was tall and narrow, and in repose fell naturally into an expression of arrogance. No better example in all the world could have been found of the epitome of everything Gurlick hated in his fellow-man. The doctor was archetype, coda, essence; and, in his presence, Gurlick was so unreasonably angry as almost to forget how to cringe.

"I didn't say that," said Langley.

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He looked at Gurlick steadily for a moment, openly selecting a course of action: Throw him out? Humor him? Or study him? He observed the glaring eyes, the trembling mouth, the posture of fear-driven aggressiveness.

He said, "Let's get something straight. I'm not a psychiatrist." Aware that this creature didn't know a psychiatrist from an accountant, he explained, "I mean I don't treat people who have problems. I'm a physiologist, specializing on the brain. I'm just interested in how brains do what they do. If the brain was a motor, you might say I am the man who writes the manual that the mechanic studies before he goes to work. That's all I am, so before you waste your own time and mine, get that straight. If you want me to recommend somebody who can help you with whatev—"

"You tell me," Gurlick barked, "you just tell me that one thing and that's all you got to do."

"What one thing?"

Exasperated, adding his impatience with all his previous failures to his intense dislike of this new enemy, Gurlick growled, "I tole ya." When this got no response, and when he understood from the doctor's expression that it would get none, he blew angrily from his nostrils and explained, "Once everybody in the world had just the one brain, see what I mean? Now they all took apart. All you got to tell me is how to stick 'em together again."

"You seem to be pretty sure that everybody—how's that again? — had the same brain once."

GURLICK listened to something inside him, Then. "Had to be like that," he said.

"Why did it have to be?"

Gurlick waved a vague hand. "All this. Buildin's, cars, tools, 'lectric, all like that. This don't git done without the people all think with like one head."

"It did get done that way, though. People can work together without—thinking together. That is what you mean, isn't it—all thinking at once, like a hive of bees?"

"Bees, yeah."

"It didn't happen that way with people. What made you think it did?"

A startled computation was made among the stars, and, given the axioms which had proved unalterably and invariably true heretofore, namely, that a species did not reach this high a level of technology without the hive-mind to organize it, there was only one way to account for the doctor's incredible statement—providing he did not lie — and Gurlick, informed of this conclusion, did his best to phrase it. "I guess what happened was everybody broke all apart, they on their own now, they just

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don't remember no more. I don't remember it, you don't remember it, that one time you and me and everybody was part of one great big brain."

"I wouldn't believe that," said the doctor, "even if it was true."

"Sure not," Gurlick agreed, obviously and irritatingly taking the doctor's statement as a proof of his own. "Well, I still got to find out how to stick 'em all together again."

"You won't find it out from me. I don't know. So why don't you just go and—"

"You got a machine, it knows what you're thinkin'," said Gurlick suddenly.

"I have a machine which does nothing of the kind. Who told you about me, anyway?"

"You show me that machine."

"Certainly not. Look, this has been very interesting, but I'm busy and I can't talk to you any more. Now be a good—"

"You *got* to show it to me," said Gurlick in a terrifying whisper, for through his fogbound mind had shot his visions (she's in the water up to her neck, saying, Hello, Handsome, and he just grins, and she says, I'm coming out, and he says, Come on then, and slowly she starts up toward him, the water down to her collarbones, to her chest, to—) and a smoky curl of his new agony. He had to get this information. He *must*.

THE doctor pressed himself away from his desk a few inches in alarm. "That's the machine over there. It won't make the slightest sense to you. I'm not trying to hide anything from you — it's just that you wouldn't understand it."

Gurlick sidled over to the equipment the doctor had pointed to. He stood looking at it for a time, flashing a cautious ratlike glance toward the doctor from time to time, and pulling at his mouth. "What you call this thing?"

"An electroencephalograph. Are you satisfied?"

"How's it know what you're thinkin'?"

"It doesn't. It picks up electrical impulses from a brain and turns them into wavy lines on a strip of paper."

Watching Gurlick, the doctor saw clearly that in some strange way, his visitor was not thinking of the next question; he was waiting for it. He could see it arrive.

"Open it up," said Gurlick.

"What?"

"Open it. I got to look at the stuff inside it."

"Now look here! I—"

Again that frightening hiss: "I got to see it."

The doctor sighed in exasperation and pulled open the file drawer of his desk. He located a manual, slapped it down on the desk, leafed through and opened it.

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"There's a picture of the machine. This is a wiring diagram. If it makes any sense to you, it'll tell you more than a look inside would tell you. I hope it tells you that the thing's far too complicated for a man without train—"

Gurlick snatched up the manual and stared at it. His eyes glazed and cleared. He put the manual down and pointed. "These here lines is wires?"

"Yes . . ."

"This here?"

"A rectifier. It's a tube. You know what a tube is."

"Like radio tubes. Electric is in these here wires?"

"This can't mean anyth—"

"What's this here?"

"Those little lines? Ground. Here, and here, and over here, the current goes to ground."

Gurlick placed a grimy fingertip on the transformer symbol. "This changes the electric. Right?"

Dumfounded, Langley nodded.

Gurlick said, "Regular electric comes in here. Some other kind comes in here. What comes in here, huh?"

"That's the detector. The input. The electrodes. I mean whatever brain the machine is hooked up to feeds current in there."

"It ain't very much."

"It ain't," mimicked the doctor weakly, "very much."

"You got one of those strips with the wavy lines?"

WORDLESSLY, the doctor opened a drawer, found a trace and tossed it on top of the diagram. Gurlick pored over it for a long moment, referring twice to the wiring diagram, then threw it down. "Okay. Now I found out."

"You found out what?"

"What I wanted."

"Will you be kind enough to tell me just what you found?"

"God," said Gurlick disgustedly, "how sh'd *I* know?"

Langley shook his head, ready to laugh at this mystifying and irritating visitation. "Well, if you've found it, you don't have to stick around."

"Shut up," said Gurlick, cocking his head, closing his eyes. Langley waited.

It was like hearing one side of a phone conversation, but there was no phone. "How the hell I'm supposed to do *that?*" Gurlick complained at one point, and, later, "I gon' need money for anything like that. No, I can't. I can't, I tell ya; you just gon' git me in th' clink . . . what you think he gon' be doin' while I take it?"

"Who are you talking to?" Langley demanded.

"I dunno," said Gurlick. "Shut up now." He fixed his gaze on the doctor's face, and for seconds it was unseeing. Then, suddenly, it was not, and Gurlick spoke to him: "I got to have money."

"I'm not giving any handouts

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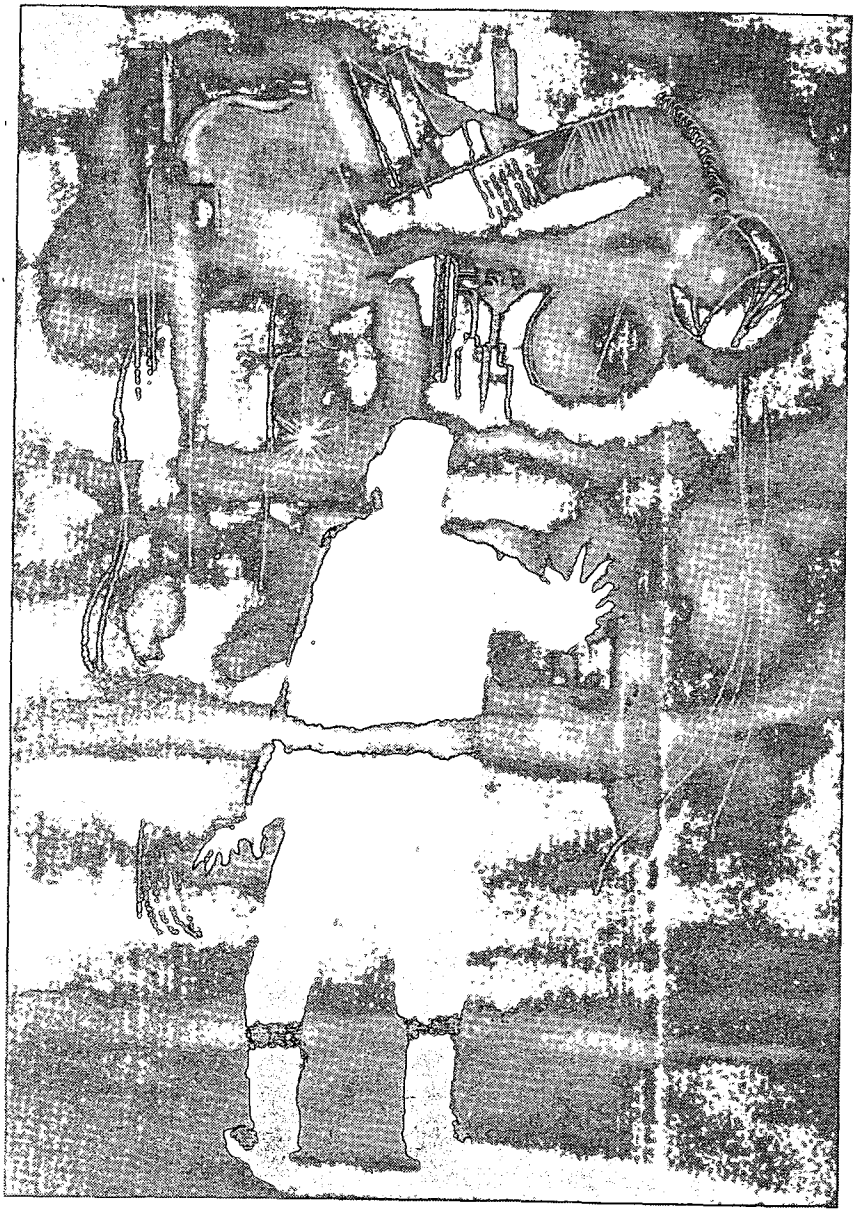

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this season. Now get out of here."

Gurlick, showing all the signs of an unwelcome internal goading, came around the desk and repeated his demand. As he did so, he saw for the very first time that Doctor Langley sat in a wheelchair.

That made all the difference in the world to Gurlick.

HENRY was tall. He stood tall and had a surprisingly adult face, which made him all the more ridiculous as he sat through school day after day, weeping. He did not cry piteously nor with bellows of rage and outrage, but almost silently, with a series of widely spaced, soft, difficult sniffs. He did what he was told (get in line . . . move your chairs, it's story time . . . fetch the puzzles . . . put away the paints), but he did not speak and would not play or dance or sing or laugh. He would only sit, stiff as a spike, and sniff. Henry was five and kindergarten was tough for him. Life was tough for him.

"Life is tough," his father was fond of saying, "and the little coward might as well learn."

Henry's mother disagreed, but deviously. She lied to everyone concerned — to her husband, to Henry's teacher, to the school psychologist and the principal and to Henry himself. She told her husband she was shopping in the mornings, but instead she was sitting in the corner of the kindergarten room watching Henry crying. After two weeks of this, the psychologist and the principal corralled her and explained to her that the reality of home involved having her at home, the reality of school involved *not* having her at school, and Henry was not going to face the reality of school until he could experience it without her.

She agreed immediately, because she always agreed with anyone who had a clear opinion about anything, went back to the room, told the stricken Henry that she would be waiting just outside, and marched out. She completely overlooked the fact that Henry could see her from the window, see her walk down the path and get into her car and drive away. If he had any composure left after that, it was destroyed a few minutes later when, having circled the block and concealed her car, she crept back past the *Keep off the Grass* sign and spent the rest of the morning peeping in the window.

Henry saw her right away, but the teacher and the principal didn't catch onto it for weeks. Henry continued to sit stiffly and hiss out his occasional sobs, wondering numbly what there was about school so terrifying as to make his mother go to such lengths to protect him, and, whatever it was, feeling silent horror of it.

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Henry's father did what he could about Henry's cowardice. It pained him because, though he was certain it didn't come from his side, other people might not know that.

He told Henry ghost stories about sheeted phantasms which ate little boys, and then sent him up to bed in the dark, in a room where there was a hot-air register opening directly into the ceiling of the room below. The father had troubled to spread a sheet over the register, and when he heard the boy's door open and close, he shoved a stick up through the register and moaned. The white form rising up out of the floor elicited no sound or movement from Henry, so the father went upstairs laughing, to see the effect he had not heard.

As stiff as ever, straight and tall, Henry stood motionless in the dark, so his father turned on the light and looked him over, and then gave him a good whaling.

"Five years old," he told the mother when he got back downstairs, "and he wets his pants yet."

He jumped out shouting at Henry from around corners and hid in closets and made animal noises and he gave him ruthless orders to go out and punch eight- and ten-year-olds in the nose and warmed his seat for him when he refused, but he just couldn't seem to make the little sissy into anything else.

"Blood will tell," he used to say knowingly to the mother who had never stood up to anyone in her life and had manifestly tainted the boy. But he clung to the hope that he could do something about it, and he kept trying.

Henry was afraid when his parents quarreled, because the father shouted and the mother wept; but he was afraid when they did not quarrel too. This was a special fear, raised to its peak on the occasions when the father spoke to him pleasantly, smiling. Undoubtedly the father himself did not realize it, but his pattern for punishing the boy was invariably a soft-voiced, smiling approach and a sudden burst of brutality, and Henry had become incapable of discriminating between a genuine pleasantry and one of these cheerful precursors to punishment.

Meanwhile, his mother coddled and cuddled him secretly and unsystematically, secretly violated his father's deprivations by contrabanding to him too much cookies and candy, yet all the while turned a cold and unresponsive back to any real or tacit plea for help in the father's presence.

Henry's natural curiosity, along with his normal rebelliousness, had been thoroughly excised when they first showed themselves in his second and third years, and at five he was so trained that he would take nothing not actually handed

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to him by a recognized authority, go nowhere and do nothing unless and until clearly instructed to do so. Children should be seen and not heard. Do not speak unless spoken to.

"Why didn't you poke that kid right in the nose? Why? *Why?*" "Daddy, I—" "Shaddup, you little yellow-belly. I don't want to hear excuses."

So tall little, sad little Henry sat sniffing in kindergarten, and was numbly silent everywhere else.

AFTER clubbing Dr. Langley with the floor-lamp, Gurlick rummaged around as ordered, and, bearing a bundle, went shopping. The Medusa permitted him to shop for himself first, quite willing to concede that he knew the subtleties of his own matrix better than it did. He got a second-hand suit from a hockshop in the tenderloin district, and a shave and a trim at the barber college.

Esthetically, the improvement was negligible; socially, it was enormous. He was able to get what he wanted, though none of it was easy, since he personally knew the names of none of the things he was compelled to buy.

Probably the metal samples were hardest of all to acquire; he had to go into an endless succession of glassy-eyed silences before a bewildered lab-supply clerk undertook to show him a periodic table of the elements. Once he had that, things moved more rapidly.

By pointing and mumbling and asking and trancing, he acquired lab-demonstration samples of nickel, aluminum, iron, copper, selenium, carbon and certain others. He asked for but could not afford deuterium, four-nines pure tantalum, and six-nines silver. The electrical-supply houses frustrated him deeply on the matter of small-gauge wire with a square cross-section, but someone directed him to a jewelry-findings store and he finally had what he wanted.

By now he was burdened with a wooden crate rigged, by an accommodating clerk, into something approximating a foot-locker in size and shape, with a rope handle to carry it by. His destination was decided after a painful prodding session by the Medusa, which dug out of Gurlick's unwilling brain a memory that Gurlick himself had long ago let vanish — a brief and unprofitable stab at prospecting, or rather at carrying the pack for a friend who was stabbing at it, years ago. The important facet of the memory was an abandoned shack miles from anywhere, together with a rough idea of how to get there.

So Gurlick took a bus and another bus, and stole a jeep and abandoned it, and at last, cursing his tormentors, slavering for his dream, and wailing his discomfort, he walked.

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Heavy woods, an upland of scrub pine and dwarf maple, then a jagged rock ridge — that was it; and the roofless remnant of the shack like a patch of decay between and against the stained tooth-roots of the snaggly ridge.

More than water, more than food or to be left alone, Gurlick wanted rest, but he was not allowed it. Panting and sniffling, he fell to his knees and began to fumble with the ropes on his burden. He took out the mercury cells and the metal slugs and the wire and tube-sockets, and began to jumble them together.

He didn't know what he was doing and he didn't have to. The work was being done by an aggregate of computing wills scattered across the heavens, partly by direct orders, partly by a semi-direct control, brain to neurone, bypassing that foggy swamp which comprised Gurlick's consciousness.

Gurlick disliked the whole thing mightily, but except for a lachrymose grumble, no protest was possible. So he blubbered and slaved, and did not, could not, let up until it was finished.

WHEN it was finished, Gurlick was released. He stumbled away from it, as if a rope under tension had tied him and was suddenly cut. He dropped heavily, reared up on his elbows to blink at the thing, and then exhaustion overcame him and he slumped and slept.

When he fell asleep, the thing was a tangle of components, possessing (to any trained terrestrial eye) a certain compelling symmetry and an elaborate uselessness (but how useless would seem a variable frequency oscillator to a wise Bushman or a savage from Madison Avenue?); but when he awoke, the picture was different. Very different.

What Gurlick had built was not, in actuality, a matter receiver, although it acted as if such a thing were a possibility. It was, rather, a receiver and amplifier for a certain "band" in the "thought" "spectrum"—each of these terms being analogous and general.

The first receiver, and its be-Gurlicked attachments, turned information into manipulation, and constructed, from the elemental samples Gurlick had supplied it, a second and much more efficient machine of far greater capacity. This in turn received and manipulated yet a third receiver and manipulator; and this one was a heavy-duty device. The process was, in essence, precisely that of the sailor who takes a heaving-line to draw in a rope which brings him a hawser.

In a brief span of hours, machines were making machines to use available matter to make machines which would scout out and

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procure locally unavailable matter, which was returned to the site and used by other machines to make yet others, all specialized, and certain of these in immense numbers.

Gurlick came unbidden out of that dream, where, as he sat on the bank on the pile of clothes, shiny black and red and an edge of lacy white, he was greeted (*Hello, Handsome*) by her who so boldly (after he refused to go away) began to come up out of the water, slowly and gleaming in the sunlight, the water now down to her waist, and she was beginning to smile—

He awoke in the midst of an incredible clanking city. Around him were row upon row of huge blind machines, spewing forth more machines by the moment:

Tanklike things with long snake necks and heads surrounded by a circlet of trumpets; silver balls ten feet in diameter, which now and then would flick silently into the air, too fast to be believed, too silent; low, wide, massive devices which slid snaillike along roads of their own making, snouted with a projector which put out a strange beam which would have been like light if it were not cut off at the far end as if by an invisible wall; and with these, sniffing along the rocks, some of which trembled and slumped; and then there would be a movement up the beam to the machine, and from behind the machine, silvery ingots were laid like eggs while fine cold dust gouted off to the side.

GURLICK awoke surrounded by this, blinking and staring stupidly. It was some minutes later that he realized where he was—atop a column of earth, ten feet in diameter and perhaps thirty feet high. All around, for hundreds of yards, the ground had been excavated and . . . used.

At the edge of his little plateau was a small domed box which, when his eye fell on it, popped open and slid a flat bowl of hot, mushlike substance toward him. He picked it up and smelled it. He tasted it, shrugged, grunted, raised the bowl to his lips and dozed its contents into his mouth with the heel of his hand. Its warmth in his belly was soothing, then puzzling, then frightening, the way it grew. He put his hands to his beltline and abruptly sat down, staring at his numb and disobedient legs.

Dazed, he looked out across the busy scape, and saw approaching him a stilted device with endless treads for feet and a turtlelike housing, perhaps a dozen feet in diameter, approaching. It straddled his imprisoning column of earth, achieving a sort of mechanical tip toe, and the carapace began to descend over him and all his perch,

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like a great slow candle-snuffer. He now could not speak, nor could he sit up any longer; he fell back and lay helpless, staring up and silently screaming . . .

But as the device, its underside alive with more wriggling tool-tipped limbs than has a horseshoe crab, slowly covered him, he was flooded with reassurance and promise, a special strength (its specialty: to make him feel strong but in no wise be strong) and the nearest thing to peace that he had ever known. He was informed that he was to undergo a simple operation, and that it was good, oh, good. He was informed why:

The spore, the "raisin," had been life or its surrogate. It had traversed space physically, bodily, and it had finished its function and its capabilities with its invasion of Gurlick. But the transfer of the life-essence of all the Medusa into all of humanity was something that Earth-built machines — even if Earth-built machines — even if not accomplish. Only life can transmit life. A very slight alteration indeed — an adjustment of isotopes in certain ionized elements in Gurlick's ductless glands—would make the membership of humanity in the corpus of the Medusa a certainty.

The machines now abuilding would effectively restore (the Medusa still unswervingly operated from a conviction that this was a restoration) the unity of the human species, its hive-mind, so that each "person" could reach, and be reached by, all persons; but the fusion with the Medusa would be Gurlick's special chore and would take place on the instant that his seed married with the ovum of a human female, much like — he received two pictures: a pair of bees in nuptial flight, then a huge, busy, buzzing hive — with, of course, himself in the all-powerful tended center. But with the difference, he was given to understand without understanding, that it would somehow be simultaneous.

As the machine slowly closed over him, its deft limbs already performing the first of a hundred delicate manipulations, it caught up his dream and congratulated him on it, and gave it detail and depth his creative poverty had never made possible to him before, so that he lived it realer than real, from the instant of approach (and a degree of anticipation which might have destroyed him had he felt it earlier) to the moments of consummation, so violent they shook the Earth and sent the sky itself acrinkle with ripples of delighted color.

And more: for in these tactile inventions there was no human limitation, and it was given to him to proceed again, and yet again, without exhaustion or dulling familiarity, either through the entire

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episode or through any smallest part of it, whether it be the thrill of seeing the clothes (shiny black and scarlet, and the tumbled frosting of lace-edged white) or the pounding, fainting climax.

Always, too, was the laughing offhand promise that *any* conquest of Gurlick's would be such a peak, or a higher one; let him wallow in his dream because he loved it, but let him understand also that it was only one of many, the symbol of any, the quality of all.

So, while it built its machines to fuse ("again") the scattered psyche of humanity, it got Gurlick —good—and—ready.

IF it isn't now, boy, Paul Sanders told himself, it never will be. Keeping one hand between the girl's gossamer-clad shoulderblades, he slid gently off the sofa, stood, stooped, and lifted Charlotte Dunsay in his arms.

Dimity *(née* Salome) Carmichael had put in a long day. Full of her thoughts of it, she put her thoughts by; standing in her showerstall, she slipped into a delicious suspension, her hand resting on the chrome handle marked *Hot — Cold.*

In Rome, a mad boy walked, incapable of hate, no longer hunted, his pressured rebellions having been caught at the kindling point and flung into a violin case. There was nothing left in Guido, no room for anything in Guido, but a heady joy and a fierce passion for this hard-gleaming, carven miracle under his arm, waiting as sensitive as a naked nerve the hungry reach of his unshackled talent. No lover, no miser, no acolyte on Earth loved woman or money or Master more than Guido loved this violin; no whelping wolverine, no wounded water buffalo was quite so watchful for an enemy.

Henry, five years old, slept as usual flat on his back and face straight up, arms rigid, fists clenched under and pinned down by his buttocks, and his ankles together. He was having a nightmare, soundlessly, of being surrounded by gentle smiling fathers, some of whom wore the masks of the other kids in his class, and storekeepers, and passing puppy-dogs, but who were really just smiling fathers, dressed up and being gentle at the very verge of exploding in his face.

And between him and all the fathers was a loving goddess with soft hands full of forbidden lollipops and peanut-butter sandwiches to be passed to little boys in the dark when they had been sent to bed without their suppers because they were little cowards; this goddess was there to care for him and protect him, but when the explosion came, with this breath or the next or the one after, the pup-

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pies and children and grocers and fathers would whisk through to him as if the goddess weren't there at all; and while they did what they would do to him, she would still be there smiling and ready with guilty lollipops, not knowing what the fathers were doing to him . . .

And under this nightmare was the color of hopelessness, the absolute certainty that to awake from it would be to emerge into it; the dream and the world were one now, fused and identical.

They left the kraal, all of them, the infants carried dangling from headbands or piggyback, the toddlers awed and huddling together, the adults hushed and wondering; and, leading them, Mbala who had regained his faith and Nuyu who had found his. The village had not far to go, kraal to yam patch; and yet it was a pilgrimage of sorts, the devout fired by the transfigured, coming to witness the miracle of the cleared field.

These are motes among the millions, remarked upon for that about them which is remarkable, yet different only insofar as each is different *from*, or has a difference *of*, some quality, and pattern of qualities, repeated two and three-quarter billion living times under this sun. There is a place in this narrative for all those close enough to each of us to be called You, and for that far more limited and select company (for many can call a man You), the privileged who are entitled to call themselves "I" (so few may do this, no two the same). *Peon*, peasant, *fellahin*, *jibaro*, mass-men with their hard hands: *matador*, mariner, apothecary, salesman, tilt-tongued with their special cants, canted each one to a special askew; this is their tale too.

GURLICK lay hooded and unaware, passive under the submicroscopic manipulations of the machine which brought his special membership in the Medusa to his seed. So he did not observe the change in the mighty operations around him, when the egg-laying snail-gaited miners drew in and darkened the snouts of light, and fell neatly apart to have their substance incorporated in other, more needed machines; and these in turn complete their special tasks and segment and disperse to others which still needed them, until at last there remained only the long-necked, tank-treaded, trumpet-headed ones, and enough silver spheres to carry them, in their multi-thousands, to their precisely mapped destinations.

There was no provision for failure, for there would be no failure. The nature of the electroencephalograph, and of its traces, clearly showed to the transcendant science of the Medusa exactly what

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was lacking in the average mind which kept it from being a common mind.

The net would be comparatively simple to cast and draw shut, for it found the potent base of the hive mentality alive and awaiting it, showing itself wherever humans blindly moved in the paths of other humans, purely because other humans so moved; wherever friends apart impulsively sat down to write one another simultaneous letters, wherever men in groups (cartels, committees, mobs, and nations) divided their intelligence by their numbers and let that incredible quotient chart their course.

The possible or probable nature of a human hive, once (re)established, was a question hardly explored, because it was hardly important. Once united, humanity would join the Medusa, because the Medusa always (not almost, not "in virtually every case," but *always*) infused the hives it touched.

So the factory area rumbled to silence, and the noiseless spheres swept over the storage yard and scooped up their clusters of long-necked projectors, fell away up with them, flashed away to all the corners of Earth, ready to place the projectors wherever their emanations (part sound, part something else) would reach masses of humans.

They could not reach all humans, but they would reach most, and the established hive would then draw in the rest. No human would escape; *none* could; *none* would want to.

Then, somewhere in this flawless, undivided, multi-skilled entity, Gurlick would plant a tiny fleck of himself, and at the instant of fusion between it and a living ovum, the Medusa would spread through it like crystallization through a supersaturated solution.

JUST another rash of saucer-sightings, thought the few observers, and recipients of their observations, in the brief minutes left to them to think as they had always thought.

Some of the military had, in these minutes, a harrowing perplexity. Anything tracked at such speeds as the radars reported must, with small variations, appear somewhere along an extrapolated path; the higher the speed, the finer the extrapolation.

The few recordings made of the flick and flash of these objects yielded flight-paths on which the objects simply did not appear. It was manifestly impossible for them to check and drop straight to their destinations at such velocities; they did, however, and before the theoreticians could finish their redefinition of "impossible," they and all their co-workers, colleagues, ac-

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quaintances, cohabitants, heirs and assigns were relieved of the necessity to calculate.

It happened so quickly, one minute a heterogenous mass of seething non-communicants, the next, the end of Babel.

HE stood motionless with the girl in his arms, ready to put her down on the sofa; and then, without a start, without a word of wonderment, Paul Sanders set her on her feet and stood supporting her with a firm arm around her shoulders until her head cleared and she could stand alone.

There was nothing said, because there was in that moment nothing to be said. In a split second there was orientation of a transcendant nature — nothing as crude as mutual mind-reading, but an instant and permeating acknowledgment of relationships, I to you, we to the rest of the world; the nature of a final and overriding decision, and the clear necessity of instant and specific action.

Together, Paul Sanders and Charlotte Dunsay left her apartment. The hallway was full of people in all stages of dress — all moving wordlessly, purposefully. No one paid Charlotte, in her nylon nightgown, the slightest attention.

They walked to the elevator bank. She paused before it with a half-dozen other people, and he opened the door of the fire stairs and sprang up them two at a time. Emerging on the roof, he went to the kiosk which sheltered the elevator motor and cables, twisted off the light padlock with one easy motion, opened the door and entered. He had never been here before in his life; yet without hesitation he reached to the left and scooped up a five-foot slice bar which lay across the grating, and ran with it down the fire stairs.

Without glancing at floor numbers, he left the fire stairs on the fourth floor, turned left and ran down the hall. The last door on the right opened as he reached it; he did not glance at the old lady who held it for him, nor did she speak. He sped through a foyer, a living room, and a bedroom, opened the window at the far right and climbed out.

There was a narrow ledge on which he could barely keep his balance and carry the heavy bar as well, yet he managed it. The chief enemy of a balancing man is the poison of fear which permeates him: *I'll fall! I'll fall!* but Paul felt no fear at all. He made a rapid succession of two-inch sidewise shuffles until he reached the big eyebolt from which there hung, out and down, the huge chain supporting one end of a massive theater marquee. Here he turned sidewise and squatted, brought his bar up over his shoulder and,

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reaching down, thrust the tip through the fourth link of the chain. Then he waited.

The street below — what he could see of it — seemed at first glance to be normally tenanted, with about as many people about as one might expect at this hour of a Saturday night. But then it could be seen that nobody *strolled* — everyone walked briskly and with purpose; one or two people ran, the way they ran indicating running to, not from anything. He saw Charlotte Dunsay cross the street, swinging along on her bare feet, and enter a showroom where computing machines were on display. Though the place had been closed since noon, it was now open and lighted, and full of people silently and rapidly working.

There came a sound, and more than a sound, a deep pervasive ululation which seemed at first to be born in all the air and under the Earth, sourceless. But as it grew louder, Paul heard it more from his left, and finally altogether from the corner of the building. Whatever was making that sound was crawling slowly up the street to take its place at the intersection, a major one where three avenues crossed.

Patiently, Paul Sanders waited.

FROM his soundless nightmare, Henry soundlessly awoke. He slid out of bed and trotted out of his room, past his parents' open door — they were awake, but he said nothing, and if they saw him, they said nothing either. Henry padded down the stairs and out into the warm night. He turned downtown at a dog-trot and ran for three blocks south, one west, and two south. He may or may not have noticed that while the traffic lights still operated, they were no longer obeyed by anyone, including himself. Uncannily, cars and pedestrians set their courses and their speeds and held them, regardless of blind corners, passing and repassing each other without incident and with no perceptible added effort.

Henry had been aware for some time of the all but subsonic hooting and of its rapid increase in volume as he ran. When he reached the big intersection, he saw the source of the sound on the same street he ran on, but past the corner where the theater stood. It was a heavy tanklike machine, surmounted by a long flexible neck, on top of which four horns, like square megaphones or speakers, emitted the sound. The neck weaved back and forth, tilting the horns and changing their direction in an elaborate repetitive motion, which had the effect of adding a slow and disturbing vibrato to the sound.

Henry dashed across the street and under the side-street marquee.

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He came abreast of the thing just as it was about to enter the intersection.

Without once breaking stride, Henry turned and dived straight into the small space between the drive-spindle of the machine's tread and its carrier rollers. His blood spouted, and on it the spindle spun for a moment; the other track, still driving, caused the machine to swerve suddenly and bump up on the sidewalk under the marquee.

Paul Sanders, at the very instant the child had leaped, and before the small head and hands entered the machine's drive, leaned out and down and jammed the chisel point of his slice-bar hard through the fourth link of the chain. Plunging outward, his momentum carried the bar around the chain and, as his weight came upon it, gave the chain a prodigious twist.

The eyebolt pulled out of the building wall with a screech, and the corner of the marquee sagged and then, as the weight of the chain came upon it, and Paul Sander's muscular body with it, the marquee let go altogether and came hammering down on the machine.

In a welter of loose bricks, sheet-tin, movie-sign lettering and girders, the machine heaved mightily, its slipping treads grating and shrieking on the pavement. But it could not free itself. Its long neck and four-horned head twitched and slammed against the street for a moment, and then the deep howl faded and was gone, and the head slumped down and lay still.

Four men ran to the wreckage, two of them pushing a dolly on which rode an oxy-acetylene outfit. One man went instantly to work taking measurements with scale, micrometer and calipers. Two others had the torch going in seconds and fell to work testing for a portion of the machine which might be cut away. The fourth man, with abrasive rasps and a cold chisel, began investigating the dismantling of the thing.

And meanwhile, in unearthly silence and with steady determination, people passed and repassed, on foot, in cars, and went about their business. No crowd collected. Why should it? Everybody *knew*.

THE entire village population, with Mbala and Nuyu at their head and the witch-doctor following, were within two hundred yards of Mbala's yam patch when the thing came down from the sky. It was broad daylight here, so the ghostly luminous moonlet effect was missing; but the shape of the projector as it dangled by invisible bands from the sphere was outré enough, unprecedented enough, to bring a gasp of astonishment and fear from the villagers. Mbala stopped and bowed down and

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called his father's name, and all the people followed suit.

The sphere dropped rapidly to the yam patch, which happened to be in a spot known locally as Giant's Voice — a flat area surrounded by four great ship's prow monoliths, the result of some ancient cataclysm which cleft the hill north and south, and again northwest by southeast. It was said that a man could shout here and be heard around the world. Exaggeration or no, it was, judging by the photograph taken by the selenium miner, an ideal position for a projector, and here it was.

The sphere set down its burden and started up again without pause, swift as a bouncing ball. The projector began its wavering bass hooting, which swept out through the echoing clefts of the Giant's Voice, rolled down upon the villagers, and silenced their chant as if it had blotted it up.

There was a moment — mere seconds — of frozen inaction, and then half the warriors turned as one man and plunged away through the jungle. The rest, and all the women and children, drew together, over four hundred of them, and poured swiftly up the slope toward the yam patch. No one said a word or made a sound, yet when they choked the space between two of the stone steeples, half the people ran into the clearing, skirting its edge, while half squatted where they were, blocking their avenue from side to side. The runners reach the north opening, filled it, and also squatted, wordless and waiting.

Directly across from the first group, in the westward opening, there was movement, as one, two, a dozen, a hundred heads appeared, steadily and quietly approaching. It was the Ngubwe, neighboring villagers with whom there was a tradition, now quiescent, of wife-stealing and warfare going back to the most ancient days. Mbala's people and the Ngubwe, though aware of each other at all times, were content to respect each other's privacy and each cultivate his own garden, and for the past thirty years or so, there had been room enough for everybody.

NOW three openings to the rock-rimmed plateau were filled with squatting, patient natives. Even the babies were silent. For nearly an hour there was no sound but the penetrating, disturbing howl of the projector, no motion but its complex, hypnotic pattern of weavings and turnings. And then there was a new sound.

Blast after shrill blast, the angry sound approached, and the waiting people rose to their feet. The women tore their clothes to get bright rags, the men filled their lungs and emptied them, and filled

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them again, getting ready.

Through the open southern gateway, four warriors erupted, howling and capering. Hard on their heels came a herd of furious elephants, three, four, seven — nine in all, one old bull, two young ones, four cows and two calves, distraught, angry, goaded beyond bearing. The fleeing warriors separated, two to the right, two to the left, sprinted to and disappeared in the crowds waiting there.

The big bull trumpeted shrilly, wheeled, and charged to the right, only to face nearly two hundred shrieking, capering people. He swerved away, his momentum carrying him along the rock wall and to the second opening, where he met the same startling cacophony. The other elephants, all but one young bull and one of the calves, thundered along behind him, and when he drew up as if to wheel and attack the second group, he was pounded and pressed from behind by his fellows.

By now quite out of his great fearless placid mind, he put up his trunk, turned his mighty shoulders against those who pressed him, and found himself glaring at this noisy, shining thing in the center of the clearing.

He shrieked and made for it, followed by the bellowing herd. The noisy, shining thing moved on its endless treads, but not swiftly enough, nor far enough, nor in enough places at once to avoid the tons of hysteria which struck it. The elephants tore off its howling head and its neck, in three successive broken bits, and shouldered it over on its side and then on its back. The howling stopped with deafening suddenness when the head came off, but the tracks kept treading air for minutes.

ELEPHANTS were used in Berlin, too, on the machine which landed in the park near the famous zoo, though this was a more disciplined performance by trained animals who did exactly as they were told.

In China, a projector squatted in a cleft in the mountains, under a railroad trestle, and began hooting into the wind. An old nomad with arthritis hobbled out of the rocks and pulled two spikes, shifted one rail. A half-mile down the track, the engineer and fireman of a locomotive pulling a combination passenger-freight train with over four hundred people aboard wordlessly left their posts, climbed back over the tender and uncoupled the locomotive from the first car. There was, on the instant, a man at every handwheel on the train. It coasted to a stop, while far ahead the locomotive thundered over the edge of the trestle and was crushing the projector before the alien machine could move a foot.

In Baffin Land, a group of Es-

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kimo hunters stood transfixed, watching a projector squatting comfortably on mounded and impassable pack ice and, in the crisp air, blaring its message across the wastes to the ears of four and possibly five widely scattered settlements. The hunters had not long to wait; high above the atmosphere, a mighty Atlas missile approached, and, while still well below their horizon, released a comparatively tiny sliver, the redoubtable Hawk.

The little Hawk came shrieking out of the upper air, made a wide half-circle to kill some of its excess velocity, and then zeroed in on the projector with the kind of accuracy the old-time Navy bombardiers would brag about: "I dropped it right down his stack."

From then on, missiles got most of the projectors, though, in crowded areas, other means were found. In Bombay, a projector took its greatest toll — one hundred and thirty-six, when a mob simply overran one of the machines and tore it to pieces with their bare hands. And, in Rome, one man dispatched four of them and came out of it unscathed.

One *man?*

Unscathed?

A boy, rather, walking along the elevated section of the new highway over the hills just north of Rome, who paused for not more than three seconds in his steady walk, then wordlessly turned and entered the Lagonda which drifted up to the curb just then. It was driven by a bright-eyed young woman, not excessively pretty, but of that unusual pure Italian type with pale red hair and green eyes. She had nothing to say, but drove the overpowered, scalded-cat Lagonda with a light touch and a sure hand.

As if on some unseen cue, the boy opened the door, slipped out on the running board, and inched forward to lodge himself firmly between the hood and the flaring fender, his knee hooked over the bracket which supports the great moon of a headlight.

BENT against the wind of their speed, he unclamped his arm from the violin case he had been clutching all this while, opened it and took out the violin, letting the case flap away like a misshapen bat. Stolidly he broke the violin in two, separating neck from soundbox, and with his teeth pulled the four pegs, freeing the strings. He let the soundbox flutter off and splinter on the steel-bound curb, and with the fingerboard of the violin in his hand, its curled scroll uppermost, he unhooked his knee from the headlight brace and got his free hand on it instead. There he crouched, slit-eyed.

As the elevated road swept in a broad curve to the left, the girl

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tooled the car as far as she could into the left lane, then put on a burst of speed which made the boy Guido's muscles crack, and shot diagonally across the road and up on the sidewalk at the right. At the last possible instant, she wrenched the wheel and swerved away from the hard teeth of the railings, and Guido sprang up and out, soaring high over the side-hill, hurtling through the air at nearly eighty kilometers per hour.

For her velocity to the micro-second, for his altitude and trajectory to seven decimal places, the best computing minds on Earth had done their utmost, matching these factors to all the others: his height and weight and the strength of his legs, the fact that of all pedestrians in the area at the time, he alone should possess such an object as the neck and carven scroll of a violin, which, it happened, was precisely the right size and curvature capable of disabling a vital membrane in the throat of the projectors at one blow; all matched with the observed trajectory of a descending sphere which carried, not one, but four projectors, obviously to a place in the City of Seven Hills where, by landing at the same place and moving apart a minimal distance, they could blanket a maximum area and number of people.

At the very peak of his parabola, and past it into the sharp descending curve, his free arm and both legs snapped like a trap around the intertwined necks of the four projectors. They were bound so that their heads were one atop the other. Guido shinnied upward far enough to reach the topmost, and crammed his shaped and hardened club into its horn. He silenced it and, with three quick blows, the other three, striking the last just as the whole package touched Earth.

The sphere began its bounce skyward angrily, but fouled in the coils of a giant steel-cored rope mat, one of those used to muffle blasting in built-up areas. The mat had been hung like a great curtain under the viaduct, and arranged to fall out and down as the sphere dipped low. A cluster of silent, sweating people waiting there caught the corner ropes and instantly anchored the mat to girders and concrete piers, and the sphere lunged and lunged upward until suddenly it began to grow hot and then fell leadenly to the ground.

Guido helped take it apart to find out how it worked.

THERE she stands the water beading her bright body her head to one side the water sparkling off her hair, she smiles, says All Right Handsome What Are You Going to Do About It?

A soft rumble and a glare of

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light: sky. Crash! A brighter, unbearable flash of light on light, a sharp smell of burning chemicals, a choking cloud of dust and smoke and the patter-patter of falling debris. Confusion, bewilderment, disorientation and growing anger at the deprivation of a dream.

The sharp command to every sentience, mechanical or not, on the entire hilltop: *Get Gurlick out of here!*

A flash of silver overhead, then a strange overall sticky, pore-choking sensation, like being coated with warm oil, and, underneath, the torn hill dwindles away. There are still hundreds of projectors left, row on row of them, but from the size of the terraces where they are parked, there must have been hundreds of thousands more.

Crash! A half-dozen of the projectors bulge skyward and fall back in shatters and shards. Look there, a flight of jets. See, two silver spheres, dodging, dancing; then the long curve of a seeking missile points one out, and the trail and the burst make a bright ball on a smoky string, painted across the sky. Crash! Crash! Even as the scarred hill disappears in swift distance, the parked projectors can be seen bursting skyward, a dozen and a dozen and a score of them, pressing upward through the rain of pieces from those blasted a breath or a blink ago; and Cra—

No, not crash this time, but a point, a porthole, a bay-window looking in to the core of hell, all the colors and all too bright, growing, growing, too, too big to be growing so fast, taking the hilltop, the hillside, the whole hill lost in the ball of brilliance.

And for minutes afterward, hanging stickily by something invisible, frighteningly in midair under the silver sphere, but not feeling wind or acceleration or any of the impossible turns as the sphere whizzes along low, hedge-hopping, ground-hugging, back-tracking and hovering to hide; for minutes and minutes afterward, through the drifting speckles of overdazzled eyeballs, the pastel column can be seen rising and rising flatheaded over the land, thousands and thousands of feet, building a roof with eaves, the eaves curling and curling out, or are they the grasping fingers of rows and rows of what devils who have climbed up the inside of the spout, about to put up *what* hellish faces?

"Bastits," Gurlick whimpered, "tryin' to atom-bomb *me*. You tell 'em who I am?"

No response. The Medusa was calculating to capacity — to its immense, infinitely varied capacity. It had expected to succeed in unifying the mind of humanity. It had correctly predicted its certainty of success and the impossibility of failure.

But success like *this?*

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LIKE this: In the first forty minutes, humanity destroyed seventy-one per cent of the projectors and forty-three per cent of the spheres. To do this, it used everything and anything that came to hand, regardless of the cost in lives or materiel:

It put out its fire by smothering it with its mink coat. It killed its rattlesnake by hitting it with the baby. It moved, reactive and accurate and almost in reflex, like a man holding a burning stick, and as the heat increases near one finger, it will release and withdraw and find another purchase while he thinks of other things. It threw a child into the drive of a projector because he fit, and because he contained the right amount of the right grade of lubricant for just that purpose at just that time. It could understand in microseconds that the nearest thing to the exact necessary tool for tearing the throat out of a projector would be the neck and scroll of a violin.

And like this: Beginning in the forty-first minute, humanity launched the first precision weapon against the projectors, having devised and produced a seeking mechanism which would infallibly find and destroy projectors (though they did not radiate in the electromagnetic spectrum, not even infrared) and then made it compact enough to cram into the warhead of a Hawk, and, further, applied the Hawk to the powerful Atlas.

And this was only the first.

In the fifty-second minute — that is, less than an hour after the Medusa pushed the button to unify the mind of Man — humanity was using hasty makeshifts of apalling efficiency, devices which reversed the steering commands of the projectors (like the one which, under its own power, walked off the Hell Gate Bridge into eighty feet of water) and others that rebroadcast the projectors' signals 180° out of phase, nullifying them.

At the ninety-minute mark, humanity was knocking out two of every three flying spheres it saw, not by accurate aiming (because as yet humanity couldn't tool up to countermeasure inertialess turns at six miles per second) but by an ingenious application of the theory of random numbers, by which they placed proximity missiles where the sphere wasn't but almost certainly would be — and all too often was.

The Medusa had anticipated success. But to sum up: success like *this?* For hadn't humanity stamped out every operable instrument of the Medusa's invasion (save Gurlick, about whom they couldn't know) in just two hours and eight minutes?

This incredible species, uniquely possessed of a defense against the Medusa (the Medusa still stubbornly insisted) in its instant,

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total fragmentation at the invader's first touch, seemed uniquely to possess other qualities as well. It would be wise — more: it was imperative — that Earth be brought into the fold where it would have to take orders.

Hence —

Gurlick.

IT swept Gurlick back into its confidence, told him that in spite of the abruptness of his awakening, he was now ready to go out on his own. It described to him his assignment, which made Gurlick snicker like an eight-year-old behind the barn, and assured him that it would set up for him the most perfect opportunity its mighty computers could devise. Speed, however, was of the essence — which was all right with Gurlick, who spat on his hands and made cluck-cluck noises from his back teeth and wrinkled up half his face with an obscene wink, and snickered again to show his willingness.

The sphere hovered now at treetop level over heavily wooded ground, keeping out of sight while awaiting the alien computation of the best conceivable circumstances for Gurlick's project. This might well have proved lengthy, based as it was Gurlick's partial, mistaken, romantic, deluded and downright pornographic information, and might even have supplied some highly amusing conclusions, since they would have been based on logic, and Gurlick's most certainly were not.

These diverting computations were lost, however, and lost forever when the sphere dropped dizzyingly, released Gurlick so abruptly that he tumbled, and informed him that he was on his own — the sphere had been detected.

Growling and grumbling, Gurlick sprawled under the trees and watched the sphere bullet upward and away, and a moment later, the appearance of a Hawk, or rather its trail, scoring the sky in a swift reach like the spread of a strain-crack in window glass.

He did not see the inevitable, but heard it in due course, the faint distant thump against the roof of the world which marked the end of the sphere's existence— and very probably the end of all the Medusa's artifacts on Earth.

He said an unprintable syllable, rolled over and eyed the woodlands with disfavor. This wasn't going to be like flying over it like a bug over a carpet, with some bigbrain doing all your thinking for you. On the other hand . . . this was the payoff. This was where Gurlick got his — where at long last he could strike back at a whole world full of bastits.

He got to his feet and began walking.

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FULL of wonder, the human hive contemplated itself and its works, its gains, its losses and its new nature.

First, there was the intercommunication — a thing so huge, so different, that few minds could previously have imagined it. No analogy could suffice; no concepts of infinite telephone exchanges, or multi-sideband receivers, could hint at the quality of that gigantic cognizance. To describe it in terms of its complexity would be as impossible — and as purblind — as an attempt to describe fine lace by a description of each of its threads. It had, rather, *texture*. Your memory, and his and his, and hers over the horizon's shoulder— all your memories are mine.

More: your personal orientation in the framework of your own experiences, your I-in-the-past, is also mine.

More: your skills remain your own (is great music made less for being shared?) but your sensitivity to your special subject is mine now, and your pride in your excellence is mine now.

More: though bound to the organism, mankind, as never before, I am I as never before. When Man has demands on me, I am totally dedicated to Man's purpose. Otherwise, within the wide, wide limits of mankind's best interests, I am as never before a free agent; I am I to a greater degree, and with less obstruction from within and without, than ever before possible.

For gone, gone altogether, are individual man's hosts of pests and devils, which in strange combinations have plagued us all in the past: the They-don't-want-me devil, the Suppose-they-find-out devil, the twin imps of They-are-lying-to-me and They-are-trying-to-cheat-me; gone, gone is I'm-afraid-to-try, and They-won't-let-me, and I-couldn't-be-loved-if-they-knew.

Along with the imps and devils, other things disappeared — things regarded throughout human history as basic, thematic, keys to the structures of lives and cultures.

Now if a real thing should disappear, a rock or a tree or a handful of water, there will be thunder and a wind and other violence, depending upon what form the vanished mass owned. Or if a great man disappears, there is almighty confusion in the rush to fill the vacuum of his functions.

But the things which disappeared now proved their unreality by the unruffled silence in which they disappeared. Tariffs, taxes, boundaries and frontiers, hatred and suspicion of humans by humans, and language itself (except as part of an art) with all the difficulties of communication between languages and within them.

In short, removed now was man-

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kind's cess-gland, the secretions of which had poisoned its body since it was born, distorting decencies like survival and love into greed and lust, turning Achievement ("I have built") into Position ("I have power").

So much for humanity's new state-of-being. As to its abilities, they were simply based, straightforward. There are always many ways to accomplish anything, but only one of them is really best. Which of them is best — that is the source of all argument on the production of anything, the creator of factions among the designers, and the first enemy of speed and efficiency.

But when humanity became a hive and needed something — as, for example, the adaptation of the swift hunting missile Hawk to the giant carrier Atlas — the device was produced without considerations of pride or profit, without waste motion, and without interpersonal friction of any kind. The decision was made, the job was done.

In those heady first moments, anything and everything available was used — but with precision. Later (by minutes) fewer ingenious stopgaps were used, more perfect tools were shaped from the materials at hand. And still later (by hours) there was full production of new designs. Mankind now used exactly the right tool for the jobs it had to do . . .

And within it, each individual flowered, finding freedoms to be, to act, to take enrichment and pleasure as never before.

What were the things that Dimity (Salome?) Carmichael had always needed, wanted to do? She could do them now.

An Italian boy, Guido, packed taut with talent, awaited the arrival of the greatest living violinist from behind a now-collapsed Iron Curtain; they would hereafter spend their lives and do their work together.

The parents of a small stiff boy named Henry contemplated, as all the world contemplated, what had happened to him and why, and how totally impossible it would be for such a thing ever to happen again. Sacrifice there must be from time to time, even now; but never again a useless one. Everyone now knew, as if in personal memory, how fiercely Henry had wanted to live in that flash of agony which had eclipsed him.

All Earth shared the two kinds of religious experience discovered by the Africans Mbala and Nuyu, wherein one had become confirmed in his faith and the other had found it. What, specifically, had brought to them it was of no significance; the fact of their devotion was the important thing to be shared, for it is in the finest nature

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of humanity to worship, fight it as he sometimes may. The Universe being what it is, there is always *plus ultra, plus ultra* — powers and patterns beyond understanding, and more beyond these when these are understood. Out there is the call to which faith is the natural response and worship the natural approach.

Such was humanity when it became a hive — a beautiful entity, balanced and fine; self-sufficient and wondrously alive. A pity, in a way, that such a work of art was to exist in this form for so brief a time . . .

GURLICK, alone of humans insulated from the human hive, member of another, sensed none of this. Driven, hungry through a whole spectrum of appetites, full of resentment, he shuffled through the woods. He had been vaguely aware of the outskirts of a town not far from where the silver sphere had set him down. He would, he supposed, find what he wanted there, though wanting it was the only thing quite clear to him. How he was to get it was uncertain; but get it he must.

He was aware of the presence within him of the Medusa, observing, computing, but — not directing, cognizant as it was of the fact that the fine details of such an operation must be left to the species itself. Had it had its spheres and other machines available, there might have been a great deal it could do to assist Gurlick. But now — he was on his own.

He was in virgin forest, the interlocked foliage overhead dimming the mid-morning sunshine to an underwater green, and the footing was good, there being little underbrush and a gentle downslope. Gurlick gravitated downhill, knowing he would encounter a path or a road sooner or later, and monotonously cursed his empty stomach, his aching feet, and his enemies.

He heard voices.

He stopped, shrank back against a treetrunk, and peered. For a moment, he could detect nothing, and then, off to the right, he heard a sudden musical laugh. He looked toward the sound and saw a brief motion of something blue. He came out of hiding and, scuttling clumsily from tree to tree, went to investigate.

There were three of them, girls in their mid-teens, dressed in halters and shorts, giggling over the chore of building a fire in a small clearing. They had a string of fish, pike and lake trout, and a frying pan, and seemed completely and hilariously preoccupied.

Gurlick, from a vantage point above them, chewed on his lower lip and wondered what to do. He had no delusions about approaching openly and sweet-talking his

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way into their circle. It would be far wiser, he knew, to slip away and go looking elsewhere; for something surer, safer. On the other hand . . .

He heard the crackle of bacon fat as one of the girls dropped the tender slivers into the frying pan. He looked at the three lithe young bodies, and at the waiting string of fish, half of which were scaled and beheaded, and quietly moaned. There was too much of what was wanted down there for him to turn his back.

Then a curl of fragrance from the bacon reached him and toppled his reason. He rose from his crouch and in three bounds was down the slope and in their midst, moaning and slavering. One of the youngsters bounded away to the right, one to the left. The third fell under his hands, shrieking.

"Now you jus' be still," he panted, trying to hold his victim, trying to protect himself against her hysterical slappings, writhings, clawings. "I ain't goin' to hurt you if you jus'—*uh!*"

HE was bowled right off his feet by one of the escapees, who had returned at a dead run and crashed him with a hard shoulder. He rolled over and found himself staring up at the second girl who had run away, as she stood over him with a stone the size of a grapefruit raised in both hands. She brought it down; it hit Gurlick on the left cheekbone and the bridge of his nose, and filled the world with stars and brilliant tatters of pain.

He fell back, wagging his head, pawing at his face, trying to get some vision back and kick away the sick dizziness, and when at last he could see again, he was alone with the campfire, the frying pan, the string of fish.

"Li'l bastits," he growled, holding his face. He looked at his hands, on which were flecks of his own blood, swore, turned in a circle as if to find and pursue them, and then squatted before the fire, reached for two cleaned fish and dropped them hissing into the pan.

Well, he'd got that much out of it, anyway.

He had eaten four of the fish and had two more cooking when he heard voices again, a man's deep "Which way now? Over here?" and a girl's answer, "Yes, where the smoke's coming from."

Jailbait . . . of course, of *course* they'd have gone for help! Gurlick cursed them all and lumbered downslope, away from the sound of voices. Boy, he'd messed up, but good. The whole hillside would be crawling with people hunting him. He had to get out of here.

He moved as cautiously as he could, quite sure he was being watched by hundreds of eyes, yet seeing no one until he glimpsed

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two men off to his left and below him. One had binoculars on a strap around his neck, the other a shotgun.

Gurlick, faint with terror, slumped down between a tree-trunk and a rock, and cowered there until he could hear their voices, and while he heard them, and after he heard them, with their curt certain syllables and their cold lack of mercy.

When all was quite quiet again, he rose, and at that moment became aware of an aircraft sound. It approached rapidly, and he dropped back into his hiding place, trembling, and peeped up at the glittering patches of blue in the leafy roof. The machine flew directly overhead, low, too slowly — a helicopter. He heard it thrashing the air off to the north, downhill from him, and for a while he could not judge if it was going or coming or simply circling down there.

In his pride, he was convinced that its business was Gurlick and only Gurlick, and in his ignorance he was certain it had seen him through the thick cover.

IT went away at last and the forest returned to its murmuring silence. He heard a faint shout behind and above him, and scuttled from cover and away from the sound. Pausing for breath, he caught another glimpse of the man with the shotgun off to his left, and escaped to the right and down.

And, thus pursued and herded, he came to the water's edge.

There was a dirt path there and no one in sight; and it was warm and sunny and peaceful. Slowly, Gurlick's panic subsided and, as he walked along the path, there was a deep throb of anticipation within him. He'd gotten away clean; and had outdistanced his enemies and now, enemies, beware!

The path curved closer to the bank of the lake. Alders stood thick here, and there was the smell of moss. The path turned and the shade was briefly darker here, at the verge of the floods of gold over the water. And there by the path it lay, the little pile of fabric, bright red, shiny black, filmy white with edges iced with lace . . .

Gurlick stopped walking, stopped breathing until his chest hurt. Then he moved slowly past this incredible, impossible consolidation of his dream, and went to the bushes at the water's edge.

She was out there — *she*.

He made a sharp wordless sound and stood forward, away from the bushes. She turned in the water and stared at him, her eyes round.

Emancipated now, free to be what she had always wished to be, and to do what she needed to do without fear or hesitation; swimming naked in the sun, sure and fearless, shameless; utterly oriented

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within herself and herself within the matrix of humanity and all its known data, Salome Carmichael stood up in the water, under the sun, and said, "Hello, Handsome."

SO ended humanity within its planetary limits; so ended the self-contained, self-aware species-hive which had for such a brief time been able to feel, to the ends of its world, its multifarious self. The end came some hours after the helicopter — the same one which had set her down by the pond — had come for Salome Carmichael, which it had the instant Gurlick quit the scene. Gurlick had seen it, from where he crouched guiltily in the bushes. After it had gone away, he slowly climbed to his feet and made his way back to the pond. He hunkered down with his back to a tree and regarded the scene unwinkingly.

It had been right there, on the moss.

Over there had lain the pretty little heap of clothes, so clean, so soft, so very red, shiny black, the white so pretty. The strangest thing that had ever happened to him in his whole life had happened here, stranger than the coming of the Medusa, stranger than the unpeopled factory back there in the mountains, stranger even than the overwhelming fact of this place, of her being here, of the unbelievable coincidence of it all with his dream. And that strangest thing of all was that once, when she was here, she had cried out, and he had then been gentle.

He had been gentle with all his heart and mind and body, for a brief while flooded, melted, swept away by gentleness. No wrinkled raisin from out of space, no concept like the existence of a single living thing so large it permeated two galaxies and part of a third, could be so shockingly alien to him, everything he was and had ever been, as this rush of gentleness.

Its microscopic seed must have lain encysted within him all his life, never encountering a single thing, large or small, which could warm it to germination. Now it had burst open, burst him open, and he was shocked, shaken, macerated as never before in his bruised existence.

He crouched against the tree and regarded the moss, and the lake, and the place where the red and the black and the lace had lain, and wondered why he had run away. He wondered how he could have let her go. The gentleness was consuming him even now . . . he had to find somewhere to put it down, but there wouldn't be anyone else, anyone or anything, for him to be gentle to, anywhere in the world.

He began to cry. Gurlick had always wept easily, his facile tears

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his only outlet for fear, and anger, and humiliation, and spite. This, however, was different. This was very difficult to do, painful in the extreme, and impossible to stop until he was racked, wrung out, exhausted. It tumbled him over and left him groveling on the moss. Then he slept, abruptly, his whipped consciousness fleeing away to the dark.

WHAT can travel faster than light?

Stand here by me, friend, on this hillside, under the black and freckled sky. Which stars do you know — Polaris? Good. And the bright one yonder, that's Sirius. Look at them now: at Polaris, at Sirius. Quickly now: Polaris, Sirius. And again: Sirius, Polaris.

How far apart are they? It says in the book, thousands of light-years. How many? Too many: never mind. But how long does it take you to flick your gaze from one to the other and back? A second? A half-second next time, then a tenth? You can't say that nothing, absolutely nothing, has traveled between the two. Your vision has: your attention has.

You now understand, you have the rudiments of understanding what it is to flick a part of yourself from star to star, just as (given the skill) you may shift from soul to soul.

With such a shift, down such a path, came the Medusa at the instant of its marriage to humanity. In all the history of humanity, the one instant (save death) of most significance is the instant of syngamy, the moment of penetration by the sperm of the ovum. Yet almost never is there a heralding of this instant, nor a sign: it comes to pass in silence and darkness, and no one ever knows but the mindless flecks of complex jelly directly involved.

Not so now; and never before, and never again would marriage occur with such explosion. A microsecond after that melding, Gurlick's altered seed to the welcoming ovum of a human, the Medusa of space shot down its contacting thread, an unerring harpoon carrying a line to itself, and all of its Self following in the line, ready to reach and fill humanity, make of it a pseudopod, the newest member of its sprawling corpus.

But if the Medusa's bolt can be likened to a harpoon, then it can be said that the uprushing flood it met was like a volcano. The Medusa had not a micro-microsecond in which to realize what had happened to it. It did not die; it was not killed any more than humanity would have been killed had the Medusa's plan been realized. Humanity would have become a "person" of the illimitable creature.

But now . . .

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NOW, instead, humanity became the creature; flooded it, filled it to its furthermost crannies, drenched its most remote cells with the Self of humankind. Die? Never that; the Medusa was alive as never before, with a new and different kind of life, in which its slaves were freed but its motivations unified; where the individual was courted and honored and brought special nutrients, body and mind, and where, freely, "want to" forever replaced "must."

And all for want of a datum: that intelligence might exist in individuals, and that dissociated individuals might cooperate and yet not be a hive. For there is no structure on Earth which could not have been built by rats, were the rats centrally directed and properly motivated.

How could the Medusa have known? Thousands upon thousands of species and cultures throughout the galaxies have technological progress as advanced as that of Earth, and are yet composed of individuals no more highly evolved than termites, lemurs or shrews. What slightest hint was there for the Medusa that a hive-humanity would be a different thing than a super-rat?

Humanity had passed the barriers of language and of individual isolation on its planet. It passed the barriers of species now, and of isolation in its cosmos. As available to Guido as the faith of Mbala now became the crystal symphonies of the black planets past Ophiuchus. Charlotte Dunsay, reaching across the world to her husband in Hobart, Tasmania, might share with him a triple sunrise in the hub of Orion's great Nebula.

As one man could share the *being* of another here on Earth, so both, and perhaps a small child with them, could fuse their inner selves with some ancient contemplative mind leeched to the rocks in some roaring methane cataract, or soar with some insubstantial life-forms adrift where they were born in the high layers of some dense planet's atmosphere.

So ended mankind, to be born again as hive-humanity; so ended the hive of Earth to become starman, the immeasurable, the limitless, the growing; maker of music beyond music, poetry beyond words, and full of wonder, full of worship.

SO too ended Gurlick, the isolated, alone among humankind denied membership in the fusion of humans, full of a steaming fog, aglow with his flickerings of hate and the soft shine of corruption, member of something other than humankind. For, while humanity had been able to read him (and his dream) and herd him through the forest to its fulfillment, it had never been able to reach his con-

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sciousness, blocked as it was by the thought-lines of the Medusa.

These lines, however, were open still, and when humanity became Medusa, it flooded down to Gurlick and made him welcome. *Come!* it called, and whirled him up and outward, showing and sharing its joy and strength and pride, showering him with wonders of a thousand elsewheres and a hundred heres; it showed him how to laugh at the most rarefied technician's joke and how to feel the structure of sestinae and sonnets, of bridges and Bach. It spoke to him saying *We* and granting him the right to regard it all and say *I*.

And more: he had been promised a kingship, and now he had it; for all this sentient immensity acknowledged to him its debt, and let him but make the phantom of a wish of a thought, and his desires would be fulfilled.

And it was at this that humanity swirled and steadied, perplexed. For Gurlick, numb and passive as he tossed like a chip on their ocean of wonders, had a wish, and had it, and had it.

True, none of this could have come about without him. This result could not have been with anyone else in his place, so — true enough — he was owed a debt. Pay it then.

Pay the debt; you do not reward a catalyst by changing it, the unchanging, into something else. So — take away hunger and poverty (of body and soul), deprivation and discomfort and humiliation, and you take away the very core of his being — his sole claim to superiority.

Don't ask him to look out among the stars and join in the revelries of giants. Don't thank him, don't treat him, and above all, do not take away from him his reasons to hate: they have become his life.

So they paid him, meticulously to the specifications he himself (though all unknowing) set up.

And as long as he lived, there would be a city corner holding drab streets and fumes, suddenly sullen pedestrians and careless, dangerous aimers of trucks and cabs; obligingly moist unbearable heat and bitter cold; and bars where Gurlick could go and put in his head, whining for a drink, and bartenders would obediently send him out into the wet with his hatred, back to a wrecked truck in a junkyard where he might lie in the dark and dream that dream of his.

"Bastits," Gurlick would mutter in the dark, hating . . . happy. "Lousy bastits."

—THEODORE STURGEON

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By CHARLES SATTERFIELD

THIRD OFFENSE

Is this why history is so untidy . . . it is being used as a social sewage system?

Illustrated by MARTINEZ

ONE minute Roykin was in the Web and it was beginning to vibrate and get hot. And then red lightnings flashed and crashed, and then he was naked, on dusty ground, under a pale winter sun. The wind was knifely cold.

Roykin stood up and looked angrily around.

A hoarse voice shouted at him, a voice like Grillard's voice, in a language he didn't understand. Grillard had all of stuffy male wrath in his voice when he talked to Roykin, and so had this voice.

But it was not Grillard. It was sobering. Roykin's anger chilled as quickly as his body, for this was no place for anger. He looked around him and what he saw made him momentarily afraid.

Bare dirt was underfoot.

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A frozen sky was overhead.

Low wooden barracks surrounded him.

Nearby was a clot of naked men with doomed and opaque faces. They were looking at him. An irregular crescent of men in brown uniforms, splashed jagged black-and-white at the shoulders, surrounded them all. The uniformed men were looking at him too.

Roykin thought anxiously: Curse Grillard, what sort of place is this?

It was a cold place that stank with a thick, pungent stink of sweat and sickness. It was a lot worse than the galleys, Roykin admitted, and at the time he had thought that there would never be anything worse. But that had been his first offense. Naturally this would be worse; Roykin could trust Grillard to see to that . . .

A man in a brown uniform stepped forward and struck him on the head with an eighteen-inch club.

The blow floored Roykin.

HE climbed to his feet with the merely tiresome sensation of physical pain filling his skull like a breath swelling a balloon.

The man was standing over him still. There was no passion in his face, Roykin noticed. He looked at Roykin as a carpenter might look at a nailhead. Perhaps the nailhead would need another blow and perhaps not, but he wasn't angry at the nail.

Hurriedly, Roykin scrambled over to the knot of naked men. They marched off in the shivering cold. The man with the club looked emptily after.

The line of bareskinned men passed a sign, with lettering on it that was hooked curlicues and straggling lines. Roykin couldn't read it very well, partly because it wasn't in his own language and partly because, although the letters were Roykin's familiar ABCs, they were more ornate than he was used to.

But underneath the more complicated words was one simple one. He read it:

BELSEN

Roykin slept that night on a board floor, with cold air coming up between the cracks.

The smell was appalling. It was a fetid slaughterhouse stench, like the hot steamy gusts from a rendering plant, but it wasn't hot — it was cold as old ice. It was very difficult for Roykin to get to sleep, particularly because a baby was crying annoyingly near his ear. The baby wept and wept.

Curse Grillard, Roykin thought in fatigue. His head still hurt badly and that was an inconvenience.

Still . . . it wasn't so bad. Roykin had always been able to adjust himself to whatever came along; it was the thing he prided himself on. At least he wasn't pushing an eighteen-foot oar, as in the galleys; *that* was

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bad, but he had adjusted to that well enough, though it was work. Roykin didn't like work. And they didn't seem to care if the prisoners worked or not in this place, whatever this place was, and that in itself was an improvement. Roykin curled up and set his mind to trying to go to sleep; but the crying baby bothered him.

Roykin propped himself up and looked around.

There was no baby. It was a man, ancient as Methuselah's father, with arms like pipestems and a face hacked out of dirty bone — no flesh, no softness, stretched rock-tight. And his eyes were closed and he was crying, crying.

Roykin could think of nothing that he could do or wanted to do about it, and accordingly returned to the effort to go to sleep. But he remembered things drowsily: things from another place and time. Grillard, furiously angry, hissing into the microphone: "You don't *deserve* another chance, Roykin. You've had chance after chance, and what do you make of them?"

"I don't like your chances," said Roykin.

"The world doesn't like you, Roykin! You're antisocial. You've stolen. You've hurt people. What are we to do? Corrective school?"

"I don't like your school."

"All right. That leaves only one thing." *Bang* came the gavel, and the microphone enlarged the sound flatly. "Second offense, thirty days. Take him away."

And the greasy-feelered police, sparkling blue from the ends of their sensors, wrapped themselves around Roykin and rolled him away to the Web.

Roykin, remembering, fell asleep to dream of Grillard and — with fond contempt — of Zenomia, who had watched at the Web as he went and would be waiting at the Web as he returned. Joke on her. Joke on Grillard — great joke!

For this to Grillard was punishment, designed to correct, this Web-borne transference to a place of punishment and pain. But Roykin had never been afraid of pain; and to Roykin pain had never been punishment.

THERE was no more parading around naked, though the filth that was in the clothing Roykin received was worse than bare skin. Roykin needed someone to talk to, and in time found someone — no, not one of his own people, but what was called a Spaniard. The language he spoke was not the inflected loan-worded Spanish Roykin was used to, but an earlier version; still, Roykin could make himself understood and could understand, though some of the words of the jailers were more familiar than the Spanish. And he had found out where he was.

Belsen? A concentration camp,

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explained his informant. For criminals, Jews, homosexuals, aliens and the politically suspect. For *what?* Haltingly, the Spaniard tried to explain each of the terms, but Roykin lacked patience for instruction in the mores of this time. Where? he asked. Germany.

Where was Germany?

His informant began to look worried, particularly as one of the men in brown uniforms was wandering near. Silently the man crept away.

But Roykin at last remembered; yes, Germany — he had heard of it. Things fell into place. He discovered that the gauntlet he had run, naked, was called "medical inspection" and, for a while, Roykin thought wonderingly of the spectrum-readers of his own time, that diagnosed physical state by electronic measurement.

But Roykin understood these matters: this was a place where things were not called by proper names; it was a place where things were concealed in part for purposes of security and in part so that those who were here should lack even the assurance of knowing what was in store for them . . . and should therefore suspect and fear everything. Roykin determined to remember that principle; it would be helpful when the thirty days were up.

The men in brown uniforms put Roykin to work.

He was taken to an open ditch where blank-faced men in filthy rags like his own were up-ending wheelbarrows of ash into the trough and others were striking the ash with great hammers.

Roykin looked closer and saw what the hammers were for. Mixed in the ash were pieces of calcined bone; it was the task of the hammers to shatter them out of shape, perhaps so that the ash itself could be added anonymously to some farmer's soil, perhaps out of an instinct for neatness.

Roykin rebelled. No, not at the cremated remains, for that was to be expected in a punishment time, but: "Work!" he cried, in the halting German he had begun to pick up. "I shall not work! I am not here for work!"

"Halt's mahl," said one of the men in brown uniforms standing by, and moved passionlessly to hit him in the face.

Roykin felt his teeth crumble. He reeled to where he was ordered to go and stood for a moment, tasting the pain. It was an inconvenience again, he thought, appraising it; but not too bad, not too bad at all.

Pain had never been punishment for Roykin, as has been said. Pain is only a tingle in the nerve endings, not different from touch or taste or chill; it is only the connotations of pain that make it feared. The pain of a knife rending through the flesh is only in part the message that the cut nerves send. In part it is also fear, and that the greater part — fear

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of death; fear of long slow healing aches; fear that it will never heal, that an arm or a leg may be lost or an eye go blind. Pain itself is not always feared — even by others than Roykin; the grueling pain of childbirth is more sought than evaded.

From such fears as make pain insupportable, Roykin, for good reason, was immune. To that degree, he was immune from pain; and this was what Grillard had not been able to learn.

All the same, Roykin picked up his hammer and began to punish the calcined bone.

ROYKIN understood that there was danger here.

Thirty days is not long, but it was up to him to survive the thirty days; it would be no court's fault if he were killed first. And perhaps, he mused, it had even been Grillard's wish that he should die here in this place, and thus the problem of Roykin should once and for all be solved. The thought amusing him, he laughed. He determined, then, to avoid the worst of the punishments these men offered.

Of such punishments there were many. Around him was more than pain, pain multiplied to a pitch that raised it to another magnitude entirely. Roykin discovered that every person in this place was here because it was desired that he die. Some were killed outright by blow or knife or gun. Some were starved. Some were placed in enormous gas chambers, stripped and extinguished, and their corpses ransacked for dental fillings and for rings.

Roykin thought, by the twentieth day, almost wistfully of the galleys.

This was not the galleys. This was something different. Here the imprisoned were not commanded to work until they died. Here they were commanded to die.

Roykin had to admit that it made a pattern and even that it had a certain elegance. This was Early Machine Age. There was no real need for human slaves, which inevitably made a difference in attitude toward the preservation of human life; the impulse to preserve life rested only on ethical considerations, not on the solid basis of conservation of usable property. There were, however, no ethical considerations in Belsen.

It was a long stride from his tenth-century galleys, where his first offense had brought him, but it was not a stride upward.

Still, he survived, though he grew quite thin. Twenty days. Thirty.

And he felt the invisible Web wrapped, tight and burning, around him. The dying prisoner whom he had been robbing of a moldy piece of bread looked apathetically up at him, then wonderingly, then disappeared.

Roykin dropped a few inches onto a padded couch.

Bright lights blazed around him. He was home.

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ZENOMIA was waiting to greet him — of course.

"Pfiu," she said, wrinkling her nose. "Darling Roykin, I am here but — pfiu."

Roykin felt strong as a tiger. He fought his way free of the Web and kicked against the protecting bars. "I stink!" he exulted. "Ah, we all did, Zenomia, but I lived and the others didn't. You, there! Let me out of here."

Behind his glass panel, the Web operator silently disapproved, but he moved a hand and the bars that kept visitors from tangling with the Web dropped away. Roykin bounded out and clutched the girl.

"We'll get married again," he planned. "I need a woman tonight. Now! You'll do."

"Roykin," she said, straining away, "please bathe. I'll wait."

Roykin laughed and, walking lightly, stripped off his clothes and threw them at the Web operator. They struck the glass and left a mark. Roykin laughed again.

He went surely to the dressing rooms on the other side of the door, for he remembered the way. Naked and laughing to himself, he passed unremembered faces, men and women who perhaps worked there, perhaps had business elsewhere in the building, perhaps had come to see what it was like — everyone knew about the Web, though only a few like Roykin would ever experience it themselves. Or perhaps they had come to see Roykin! Some of the faces seemed to know him, for they whispered to each other.

He laughed louder. Roykin! Roykin knew Roykin, too — it was a name that everyone should know!

He was still laughing as the bath sprayed him, soaped him, rinsed him and dried him.

"Love?" whispered the bath recording, its perfume sprays and powder jets cocked. "Sport? Sleep? What is your pleasure?"

Roykin frowned. The mood for Zenomia had passed him.

"Nothing," he decided. "Just get me out of here."

Warm gusts of air wrapped themselves obediently around him and the curtain slipped away.

He stepped out and clothed himself, while Zenomia waited lovingly. But he said grandly, "Not now. I will see you later, perhaps. Now I intend to visit with Grillard."

GRILLARD'S house stood alone on stilts in six feet of water.

"Hoy!" cried Roykin, waving at the house. "Come get me!"

Obediently, the house unrolled a floating streamer from the door to the grassy bank where Roykin stood. He stepped on it and stood regally as it retracted to deposit him on the doorstep.

A silvery voice recognized him and chimed, "Roykin, Roykin," though he had never been there before.

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Trust Grillard, he thought — he hasn't neglected to tell the house that I might appear. Roykin waited, tapping his foot.

Grillard himself appeared.

The handsome face, white-haloed, was dignified but uneasy. "What do you want, Roykin?"

"I'm back, Grillard."

"I know you're back. I signed the order for the Web."

Roykin pushed by him. "You signed the order that sent me there, too."

"I had no choice. What do you want?"

Roykin walked on in and sat down, fingering little knickknacks on a table before him. "Chinese, Grillard?" he guessed, picking up a little figurine. It was quite heavy and dangerous. "It looks Chinese."

"Get out of here, Roykin."

Roykin considered. "No," he decided, "I don't want to do that. I thought I wanted Zenomia, but I didn't want her either. I'm not sure what I do want. Is that amusing, Grillard?"

Grillard peered fretfully out from the white whiskers that framed his face. He said uneasily: "I'm warning you, Roykin. The next time will be your third offense, and that isn't a matter of thirty days."

"What is?" asked Roykin dreamily. "No, it wasn't Zenomia I wanted, though she has taut breasts. It wasn't a woman at all. I wanted to frighten someone."

"Get out of here!"

"I may steal your Chinese figurine," said Roykin, "or I may hit you with it. Perhaps I will pull out your whiskers. Have you a wife, Grillard? I don't know, maybe I could violate her. I have learned these things, in thirty days with your help as well as elsewhere. I am grateful, I think."

"Roykin," Grillard cried shrilly, "the third offense is — "

"Shut up, old man, and come here," said Roykin, moving toward him, and he couldn't afterward remember what had come next.

BUT he remembered what happened the next morning, oh, yes.

Grillard, with a bit of surgeon's plaster across his forehead, stood over him on the dais, scowling, and said into the microphone: "The diagnosis is total dissociation, schizoid. Third offense. One week." And then it was the Web again.

Roykin leaped to his feet where the Web dropped him, very angry, for not even Zenomia had been there to see him go. (He thought, though he couldn't remember for sure, that he had been to see her after striking Grillard. Also there had been something about a fire. Perhaps he had made her dislike him.)

But he looked about him, and he was not so angry. This time they had let him keep his clothes, and

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besides it was not cold. Oh, it was *hot*. Fools, he cried silently, very pleased. Only *one* week?

But it might be an unpleasant week.

Foul stenches smote his nose. He was standing calf-deep in thick black mud, and two sorry horses were straining to draw a wheeled wagon past him. The heat was appalling; the smell was awful; there were clouds of insects. (But only one week! he sang to himself.)

"Hi!" he cried. "Hoy!"

The man on the wagon shouted at him and whipped his horses. This angered Roykin and he leaped to the wagon — leaped and missed and came down half sprawling in the ugly mud. But he caught himself up again, laughing (only one week!), and climbed aboard.

"Where am I, man?" he demanded. "When is this?"

The man snarled at him.

"Man, tell me!" cried Roykin, and finally made himself understood.

"Philadelphia?" repeated Roykin, trying to remember where *that* was. "And the year is seventeen hundred and ninety-three?"

It made no sense, no sense at all. He swung off the wagon and let the carter flog his feeble beasts away. There were many like him; the road was packed. Overhead, a cloud-fogged sun steamed the earth gently, evoking every smell that the smeared soil was capable of. Seventeen-ninety-three, thought Roykin, frowning. But what was 1793, that it should be a punishment? And for only one week?

"Ware!" cried a voice strongly. "Ware for the dead wagon!"

And another wagon sloshed and slithered by; and it held a cargo of stickfigures in rags. There had been bodies like that in Belsen when Roykin took the task of cleaning out the gas rooms after a busy day's extermination; but he had never thought to see them here.

"Ware!" cried the dead-cart driver's voice, passing away. "Ware for the victims of the yellow fever!"

And Roykin stopped and looked around.

It was a city in flight and he was in the middle of it. Half of Philadelphia was on these roads, striving for the safety that lay outside the city — striving in vain for wherever they went they could not escape themselves, and it was in themselves that the plague lay.

Yellow fever!

ANGRILY Roykin ran, slipping and falling, to a house and thundered at the door. A curtain quivered at an upper window, but the door remained barred.

"Prophylaxis!" shouted Roykin. "An ampoule of antibiotic, quickly!" The window curtain quivered again to mock him, and then not even that.

"I beg you!" shouted Roykin,

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but no answer. And how could there be? he sobbed to himself. Seventeen hundred and ninety-three! Antibiotics were nearly two centuries away, as far from reach as the Moon!

He looked around him again, and the smell no longer mattered. It was filth that bred the fever, but the fever was grown now; the filth no longer mattered.

Yellow fever.

With horror, Roykin brushed the stinging insects from his skin.

But they returned again, bringing their itch of death.

There were wagons, there were roads, there were many ways of getting out of the city.

But not in time. Roykin stood with the whining mosquitoes swarming around his head, staring up at the uncaring sky.

Third offense.

One week.

— CHARLES SATTERFIELD

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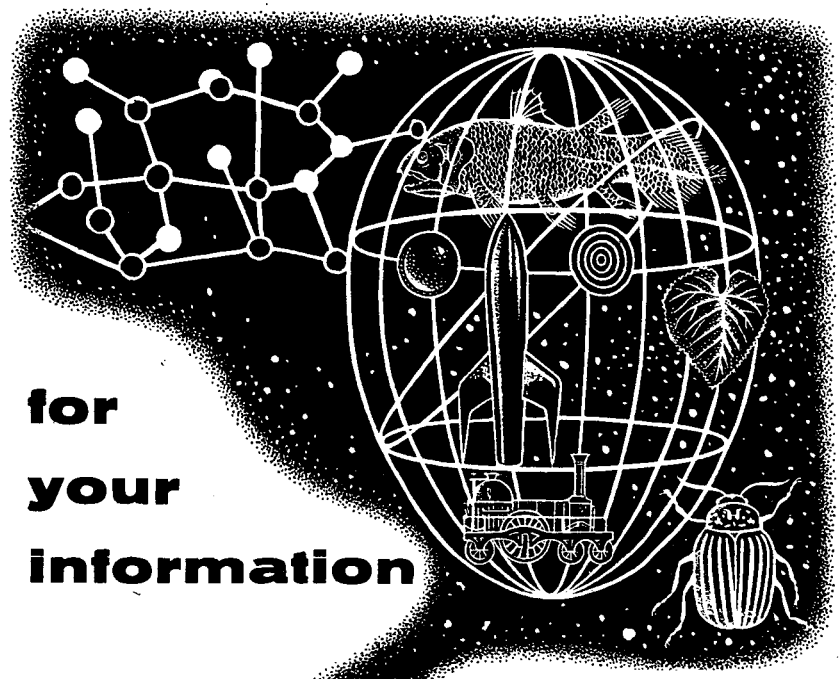

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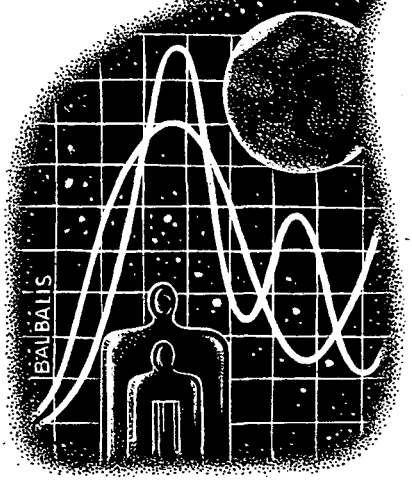

BY WILLY LEY

HOW TO GET AROUND ON OTHER PLANETS

By WILLY LEY

THE year will be around 1985 A.D.

Captain Sixtus E. Boyle, assisted by Navigator Roderich Meerschaum, has just put his ship down at latitude 6° 15′ S. on Mars. What do they do next?

Before landing, they had orbited Mars for several days in order to take detailed pictures of the surface in the equatorial regions so

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that they could decide on a suitable spot for landing. The general instructions which they carried both on perma-paper and in their heads had been somewhat vague about the landing itself. They merely stated that the landing should be made near the Martian equator for reasons of temperatures.

Near the equator, one could expect reasonable temperatures during the day. The nights would be extremely cold, but that could not be helped. Far from the equator, it would be cold around the clock.

In addition to the order to land near the equator, the instructions merely said that, "of course," the landing place should be "in the proximity of interesting formations." Captain Boyle finally found a spot on the photographs which looked like smooth desert with a ridge of fairly high hills (rare on Mars) not too far away. There is also a "canal" nearby. On the pictures taken from the orbit around Mars, the formation did not look like a "canal," nor like anything else for which there was an established name.

But the charts drawn from a long distance — Earth, that is — insisted that it was a canal. Hence it was something to be investigated.

Now the ship sits on the desert sand, undamaged. The ridge of hills is to the north, clearly visible, and it looks as if it were about five miles away. And the "canal," whatever it really is, must be to the east. It is not visible from the ship, but if they hit anywhere near the intended spot, it would be about twenty miles away.

The captain decides that one does not explore well on an empty stomach, so the crew eats first. There is a rest period of several hours, mostly for the purpose of getting used to gravity again. Then the captains assign watches and two men break out the ground car.

LET'S come back from the future and think about that ground car for Mars. How would you design ground transportation for such different conditions?

But the first question might well be whether you really need a ground car. What's wrong with walking?

Of course one could walk on Mars.

As has been mentioned, the daytime temperatures near the Martian equator are bearable, even if highly extreme. In the morning, say, one hour after sunrise, it is still about forty below zero. An hour after noon, it is around seventy above zero. The tropics of Mars might better be called its "intemperate zone," but they do not represent an impossible situation. Our own highland of Tibet is very nearly as bad; the temperature

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does not go so low there during the night, but it climbs to around a hundred in daytime when the season is right.

Air pressure is a somewhat different story. The Martian atmosphere, near the ground, has roughly the same pressure as our own atmosphere eleven miles up. This calls for a pressure suit, especially since the oxygen content seems to be near zero. Even if it were all oxygen, a man could not breathe at such a low pressure. The inconvenience of the pressure suit is more than compensated by the low gravity — a man will weigh precisely 38 per cent of what he weighs on Earth. Which means that even a heavy suit, with oxygen bottles on the back and all kinds of hand tools dangling from the belt, will not produce full Earth weight for the explorer.

So one could walk and the men will do it for short distances. But, for exploration, ground transportation of some kind is needed. Specimens will have to be carried to the ship. Even if they are not heavy, they might be awkward to handle.

The design of any kind of ground transportation is chiefly influenced by the nature of the ground. On Mars, there may be rocky ground in many places, rather rough. Much of it must be sandy desert. And in those areas which look dark when seen from Earth, there are likely to be salty marshes. For all these types of ground, wheels are not practical.

THE first alternative that always occurs to everybody, when wheels won't do, is the caterpillar tread. But it has its limitations too, and for Mars the best bet is indubitably the so-called "rolligon" — the barrel-shaped inflated pillows developed for similar conditions on Earth.

Rolligons produce fine traction on sand and do not sink in. They can tolerate very rough rocky ground and don't shake up the driver in the process. They do well in marshes, and if the water should be too deep, they will float. They could be inflated on the spot with Martian atmosphere. It would take some time because the atmosphere is so thin, but it can be compressed.

The question of engine power is somewhat more complicated. It must not need air, for we have to go on the assumption that Martian air will not sustain combustion, even when compressed to what we consider normal density. Right now we know three types of non-air-breathing engines. They are (1) the rocket, (2) the electric motor and (3) the atomic reactor.

Rocket power is useless for the conditions in question, because the ground vehicles must be able to

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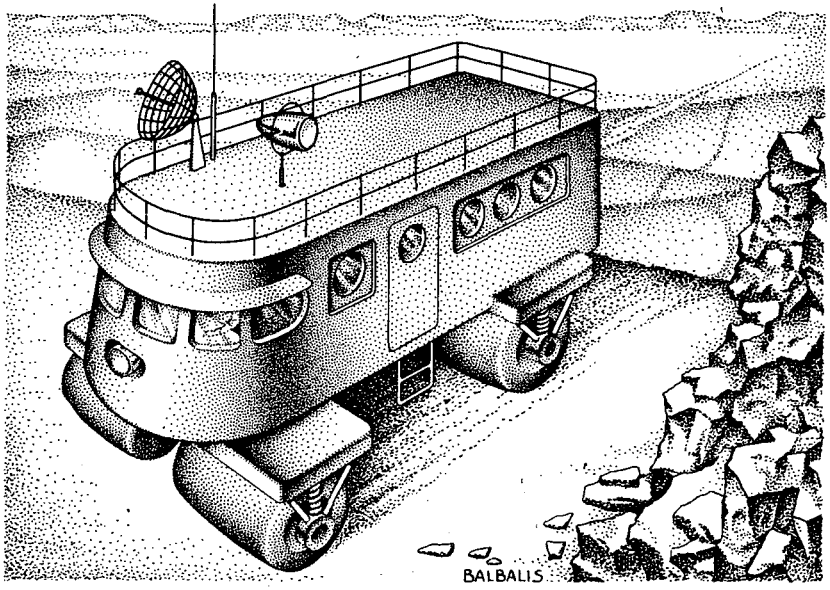

Fig. 1: Rolligon Mars car, driven by hydrogen peroxide turbine

move very slowly, which is the one thing the rocket cannot do, at least not efficiently. The electric motor could provide almost any speed range desired, but it needs electric current. Of course, one might say that between 1958 and 1985 somebody may invent an incredibly efficient kind of storage battery. This is possible, but nobody can promise that somebody else will.

As regards atomic reactors, we can't really tell. Maybe it can be built small enough and light enough in time, but it would be hard to say when, and impossible to tell what other complications might go with a small reactor.

It was pointed out several years ago — by Wernher von Braun — that a ground car for an airless planet or a planet with oxygenless atmosphere could be turbine-powered, provided you pick the right fuel for the turbine. The right fuel would be hydrogen peroxide, H_2O_2. At ordinary temperatures, hydrogen peroxide is a liquid and it is quite safe if pure, or rather if it does not contain any other impurities than water. When hydrogen peroxide is decomposed, the reaction proceeds according to the formula

$$2\ H_2O_2 \longrightarrow 2\ H_2O + O_2$$

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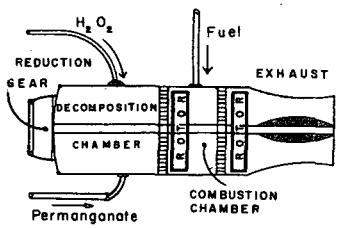

Fig. 2: Diagram of two-stage hydrogen peroxide turbine

It produces water and free oxygen. It also produces, which the equations fails to show, a large amount of heat. Hence the water appears in the form of steam, so that the product is a mixture of steam and hot oxygen. If there was water present in the hydrogen peroxide, this water is naturally heated into steam too.

FOR 80 per cent hydrogen peroxide (the other 20 per cent being water), all the water, both the 20 per cent present and the water formed by the decomposition, will appear as steam with a temperature of 870 degrees Fahrenheit. This steam can turn a turbine wheel. After it has passed through the turbine wheel, the steam will be too cool and too weak to do additional work.

But the free oxygen that was formed by the decomposition and which is mixed with the steam has not done any work worth mentioning. So far, it has only increased the bulk somewhat. So, when it emerges from the turbine wheel, the steam-oxygen mixture enters a combustion chamber where some ordinary fuel like gasoline is injected. After it has burned, there is now a mixture of hot carbon dioxide from the combustion and reheated steam. This can drive a second turbine wheel.

You have here what is known as a two-stage turbine which is not air-breathing, hence the ideal power plant for ground vehicles on airless or oxygenless planets.

But by the time an expedition sets out for Mars, there will be an establishment of some sort on the Moon. Conditions on the surface of the Moon are like those on Mars, with much exaggeration.

Where Mars has a thin atmosphere, the Moon has just traces of gases, argon and so forth. (When I say traces, I mean *traces*, not just a highly attenuated gas.) Where Mars cools off to an estimated seventy degrees below zero during the night, the Moon cools to an estimated one hundred degrees below zero during *its* night — if a night lasts two weeks, Earth time, the surface obviously has a better chance to radiate what heat it has into space. Likewise, the two-week day produces higher temperatures as it wears on slowly.

Near the Moon's equator, the temperature of the surface rock

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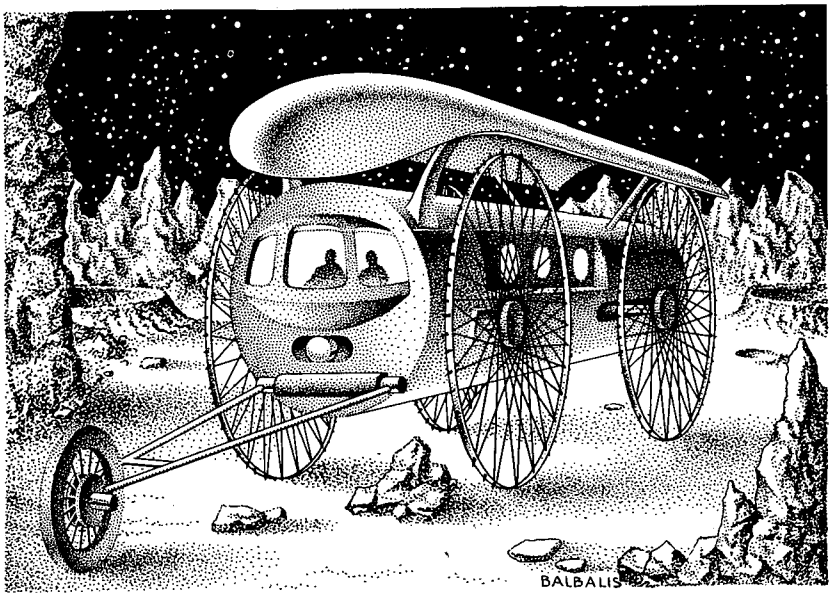

Fig. 3: Moon car

climbs to beyond the boiling point of water after a week of sunshine.

As for condition of the lunar surface, one can only say that it is not Earthlike. The old ideas about the rock cracking into splinters because of the large temperature span between day and night have been abandoned. Laboratory experiments have shown that rock will not crack if heated and cooled as slowly as in the course of a full lunar day.

But the rock is being pounded by meteorites of all sizes. Meteorites of a size that form craters visible from Earth are naturally rare. But cosmic dust grains are very frequent. Each dust grain hitting lunar rock will produce several other dust grains. The cosmic rays join in this work; they can, and in time will, break up the crystalline structure of the rock.

THE overall result of these forces, acting over several million years of time, must be sharp rocks on the one hand and a layer of dust on the other. On an exposed vertical or very steep rock surface, the action of dust formation must be continuous, since the rock flakes and dust produced will simply fall off and settle on the

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ground. On a flat area, however, the process must be self-limiting, because the dust formed will protect the rock underneath against further meteorite and cosmic ray impacts.

The question is how far the dust-forming process can be carried before the dust becomes a protection. In the case of tiny metorites, roughly speaking of the size of sand grains, half an inch of dust will obviously be enough; the force of a new impact will not be carried through such a layer, but will be dissipated by throwing some of the existing dust around. Cosmic rays could easily penetrate a half-inch layer of dust, however, and continue the process of the destruction of the rock. But this process must be self-limiting too, except that the required dust layer would have to be thicker.

The general consensus right now is that the average depth of a dust layer might be about an inch, but that in some places a much deeper accumulation is easily possible. If dust is fine enough, it will behave more or less like water, and the English astronomer Thomas Gold — now in the United States — has suggested that the smoothness of the Moon's *maria* is due to such a dust accumulation; the *maria* might be just large depressions filled with dust.

The lunar surface, then, must be rocky with a dust layer on top, with possible accumulations of dust of great depth.

The two-stage hydrogen peroxide turbine would work on the

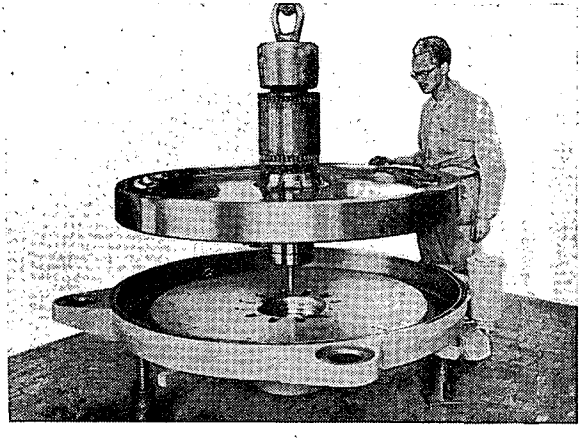

Fig. 4: Flywheel of Oerlikon Gyrobus

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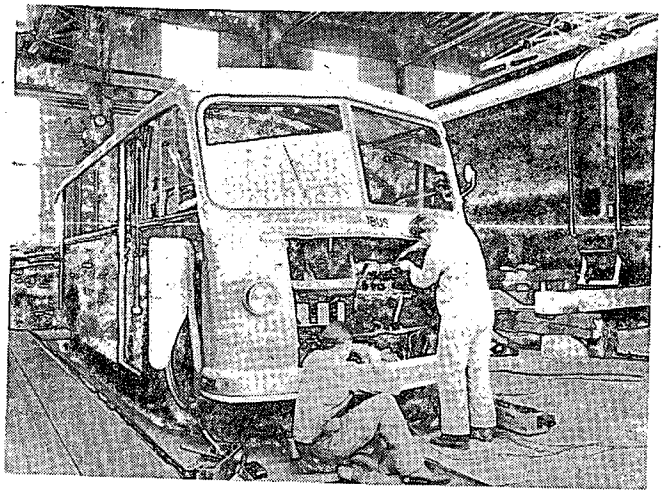

Fig. 5: Prototype of Gyrobus under construction

Moon too; the problem is what shape to give to the car. Most people who had to think about this problem — the first probably were illustrators of science fiction magazines — have simply settled for a tank as the most likely shape. Caterpillar treads can negotiate any kind of ground except ground that is very soft. They do not slip easily on gravel and can take considerable inclines.

But so can rolligons, and if there are such dust-filled depressions, the rolligons would be safer. If a tank shape is picked, it might be practical to have a tank push an ordinary heavy wheel ahead of itself on a boom. This would show where the ground is treacherous.

Another likely shape for a Moon car would be a vehicle which simply has four wheels, but very large wheels, at least fifteen feet in diameter, with spiked rims. Such a vehicle could make much better speed on flat ground, and because of the large size of the wheels, there would be a high clearance between the body of the car and the ground, which would permit the passing of obstacles where a tank would have to lurch and clamber.

IT is very likely that every Moon car would have to carry a sheet metal "shield" on vertical booms above its body.

This shield would, in the first place, be a protection against too much sunlight. Since the Moon lacks anything that could reasonably be called an atmosphere, the

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sunlight beating down on the lunar plains will be about three times as powerful as the tropical Sun on a clear day on Earth.

In the second place, the shield would protect the body of the car against the fairly frequent dust particles coming from space with an average velocity of forty miles per second. They would cover the shield with nearly microscopic pits in the course of time, but they would not penetrate.

But if there is a permanent base of some kind on the Moon, electricity would be a possible source of power for the Moon cars in the vicinity of the vase. The base would have an atomic reactor, a stationary power plant, for its own needs. Ground cars staying close to the base could run on rechargeable batteries.

The problem is that rechargeable batteries must not be exposed to a vacuum; they have to be pressurized — that is, they must be located in the interior of the Moon car. This might be inconvenient, to say the least, and the designers therefore are likely to fall back on a trick used in Switzerland a few years ago.

Engineers of the Swiss firm of Oerlikon, at Oerlikon, near Zürich, built an experimental bus with a capacity of two dozen passengers. The wheels of this bus were driven by an ordinary three-phase electric motor, but the current for the motor was not supplied by either overhead wire or by batteries. The energy was stored in a one-ton flywheel, measuring six feet in diameter and mounted in a horizontal position under the floor of the bus.

To reduce friction, the Swiss engineers ran the flywheel in a sealed casing in a hydrogen atmosphere, but this is a minor point.

A second three-phase motor was

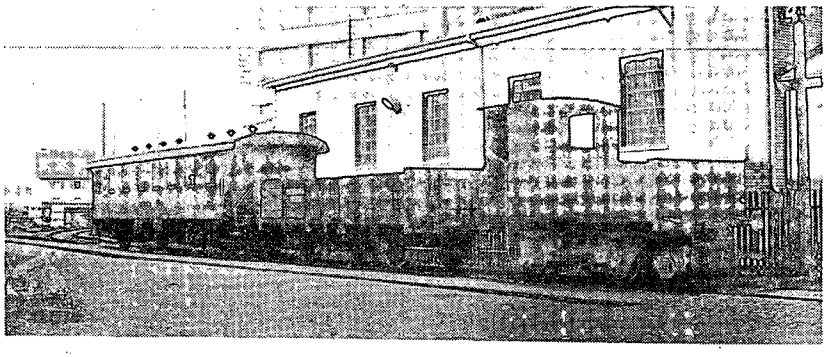

Fig. 6: Flywheel locomotive for yard duty and shunting
Figs. 4, 5 and 6, Courtesy Oerlikon Engineering Co., Oerlikon, Switzerland.

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mounted on the flywheel shaft, and at the terminal, this motor brought the flywheel up to 3000 revolutions per minute, drawing current from the net. When disconnected from the net, this motor became the generator, drawing mechanical energy from the flywheel and supplying electric current to the drive motor.

After six miles of stop-and-go driving with a full passenger load, the flywheel had run down to 1500 revolutions per minute. It then needed recharging, which could be done by means of power outlets near passenger stops. The recharging took two minutes. Then the bus was ready for another six-mile run.

With a stationary power plant for the Moon base, such flywheel-driven vehicles would be very practical for routine runs on the lunar surface. If there are a number of routine stops — say, lunar base, space port, astronomical observatory and so forth — cables could be laid to those points from the power plant, with intermediate recharging points where necessary.

The problem of getting around on other planets bears much resemblance to quite a number of other detail problems in space travel. Engineers have very definite ideas of how these problems could be solved. They could even build their solutions right now.

But these solutions are not needed here on Earth. They are needed at the other end of the trip.

And the first problem is to get to the other end of the trip.

— WILLY LEY

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THE TROUBLE WITH ELMO

By DANIEL KEYES

Said trouble being that Elmo had to live by his wits — and the one man who could outwit him couldn't do it wittingly!

"THE trouble with Elmo," shouted Senator Ferdus, as Private Busby helped him up into the copter, "is that he thinks he's in business for himself. He's got to be made to understand once and for all, Busby, that he's only a computing machine."

The thin, weary-looking private, haggard from lack of sleep, checked his controls and then peered through the early morning mist at the Washington Control Tower. Over the roar of the spinning rotors, he could hear the Senator still talking.

"—Our government won't toler-

Illustrated by MARTINEZ

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ate it, Busby. Elmo has been pulling this for years just to excuse his staying alive. It won't do, Busby. It's blackmail. And I'm warning you that it's your job to—" The Senator paused as he looked around him. "Busby! Why aren't we off the ground?"

Private Busby pointed to the flickering red light on the control panel. "Waiting for an automatic beam to the other side of the Potomac."

"Busby, this is an *emergency!* For all I know, that mechanical monster is creating a new crisis at this very moment. Forget about the automatic. You can fly this thing without—"

Busby took a deep breath and flicked the manual control switch, lifting the copter so quickly that the Senator lost the rest of his sentence. He glared suspiciously, waggled a fat but threatening finger. "Busby, I suspect you're on Elmo's side."

All the way to Computer Base, the Senator hammered away. "Mark my words, Busby. The people will not stand for the idea of spending twenty millions a year to service an Electronic Monitor that served its purpose more than fifteen years ago. You'd better come through with a demolition job this time. Not in twenty or thirty years, when *Elmo* decides he's ready, but now, Busby, *now!* Otherwise, I'm afraid I'll have to recommend and insist upon your demotion."

JAKE Busby sighed, glanced down at the stitch marks that formed a chevron-shaped scar on his sleeve.

"Senator," he said, "fifteen years ago, when they assigned me to the Computer Demolition Squad, I was a master sergeant with a good record. And then the President issues the order to dismantle Elmo. The Secretary of Cybernetics hands it to the General of the Army, and down it comes through the old chain of command. Generals, colonels, majors, until — where does it end up? Right here in the lap of Jake Busby.

"And since then, Senator, I've had my ratings taken away from me, stripe by stripe, by every officer who blames me for not getting his promotion. Senator—" Busby settled back and lit one of his favorite cigars, calmer now—"I'm sorry, but I've got no more stripes to give."

"What did you do before you volunteered to serve your country?"

"I didn't volunteer, Senator. I was drafted. Before that, I ran a little business of my own. Busby's Fixit Shop. And I used to go from house to house to find out if people needed anything fixed or—"

"How old are you, Busby?"

"Forty-six, Senator. And I had

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this shop of mine all fitted out with lathes and—"

"Then will you tell me," snapped the Senator, "why the Army's best computer technician, after twenty-two years in uniform and fifteen years of study and preparation, can't get Elmo dismantled? My boy, don't you see what you're *doing* to your military career?"

"Senator, I go through this every few years, but I'll say it again: Elmo was built to solve the world's major problems, and he can't let himself be dismantled until he's finished the job. Now you've got to admit that this cobalt radiation in the atmosphere was a threat to human survival."

"You know as well as I do, Busby—as well as any sixth-grade child knows by now — that Elmo *caused* the cobalt radiation in the first place."

Busby hunched angrily over the controls and stared ahead as he chewed his cigar. "The cobalt radiation was a byproduct of the solution to the world-famine threat. If not for Elmo—"

"If not for your Elmo," shouted the Senator, "there would have been no famine in the first place! It was a result of his solution to the storm cycle that he created to solve the problem of the five-year drought. Your Elmo solves one problem by creating a new one, just to keep us from putting him out of business. Well, you'd better make certain that this new solution to the cobalt radiation hasn't created any new problems. Otherwise, Busby, if they can't break you any lower than a private, I'll see that you're court-martialed."

"But that's not fair! Is it my Computer? Why do I have to be the goat? For crying out loud, I didn't build him!"

Senator Ferdus shrugged his shoulders and clasped his hands across his huge stomach. It was a final movement, like the passing of judgment. "Busby, the people are crying for blood. If it's necessary, yours will have to do."

Busby stared at his cigar, chewed to shreds the way it always was when he became upset. As they approached Computer Base, the dreadful question pounded into his mind as it had during all these months of waiting. Elmo had solved the radiation problem. *What would the new problem be?*

FROM the air, the building housing Elmo at its center looked like a flat oval — the outline shape of an egg. There, two hundred feet below ground level, the Electronic Monitor (known as Elmo for short) worked away at solving the problems of mankind. Busby lowered the copter gently — like a giant spider at the end of an invisible thread — to the roofport cradle.

He wouldn't be in this mess

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now, thought Busby, if they had let him out of the Army when his hitch was up. When it was discovered he had been trained for the special job of dismantling Elmo, someone declared him essential to the national defense. His discharge was pigeonholed and he was assigned to demolition duty at Computer Base.

He remembered his first years as an aide to the scientists who built Elmo. Under their instruction, he got to know Elmo and became more interested in learning how an Electronic Monitor worked. He serviced Elmo's parts with the loving care that a boy bestows on his first jalopy. He polished and oiled and tightened. And by the time the last of the scientists died, Busby knew more about Elmo than any man alive.

And of course there were the feelings of guilt as he waited for Elmo to outlive his usefulness, waited for the final problem to be solved so he could perform his duty — as executioner. Thinking about that now, he caught himself up short. As much as he loved Elmo, he couldn't deny the peculiar problems that were so unexpected and suspicious. If Elmo was really creating them, as some people said, to stay alive, then Elmo was a menace.

Inside the central vault, the Senator strode up and down with his hands clasped behind his back while he surveyed his electronic nemesis. "All right, Busby, let's get to it. I want to know exactly how Elmo has solved this problem. And then I want you to get right to work on the demolition job. Unless he's pulled another fast one. And if he has, by gad—"

"Oh, shut up!" It came out without Busby realizing it, but suddenly he was glad he said it.

Senator Ferdus' mouth dropped open and he stared with bulging eyes beneath his thick white eyebrows. "I—I—how dare—"

Busby swallowed and decided that, for once in his life, he would go all the way. "Now listen, Senator. Outside this control room, you may be a big shot as the duly elected representative of suckers from Idaho, but down here you're just my guest. I'm the only person who has unlimited clearance — even the President accepts that. If you keep your mouth shut, you can stay. If not, I'll have to see that you're escorted off Computer Base. As I mentioned before, Senator," he added, pointing to the stitch marks on his sleeve, "I have nothing to lose."

LIKE a gulping fish, the Senator opened and closed his mouth, finally shut it without saying anything. The transformation in Busby's behavior was unmistakable; here he was undisputed authority. The Senator nodded a bright red

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face and seated himself in a nearby chair.

"Good, Senator. We understand each other. Now let's find out what this is all about." Busby reached over and threw the kinescope tape-key that would present Elmo's verbal and visual report.

In the midst of the semi-circular arc of computer banks, a video screen flashed into blinding whiteness. On both sides of this screen, oscilloscopes traced the electrical waves of sound. The voice boomed out, deep, hollow, clear. Elmo's bass was slightly metallic, but to Busby it had the familiar tone of a friend.

"— in answer to your move, Knight to Queen four, I move Bishop to Bishop five, check—" The video, now in focus, showed a closeup of Busby straining, deep in thought, over a chessboard.

Busby fumbled with the tape-key. He had gone too far back on the kinescope recording. From the accusing look on the Senator's face, Busby knew he would have a hard time explaining to a Senate investigating committee why he used a multi-billion-dollar Electronic Monitor as a chess companion.

Silently cursing himself, he found the position on the tapes that indicated the exact time he left the control room to pick up the Senator. Why hadn't he remembered to erase the chess-playing tapes as he always did? It was too late now. The Senator was making notes in his memo book.

"Here we are," said Busby, trying to appear lighthearted. "Now we'll find out what's going on."

At first there was no sound, and the video showed only the usual scanning of the various parts of the world. Then the picture halted and closed in on the scene of an open meadow just half a mile south of Computer Base. There appeared a circle of shimmering orange light, like a spotlight, against the background of the uncut grass.

The Senator leaned forward. "What's that?"

Before Busby could say he had no idea, they were confronted with the materialization of an enormous silver object that resembled an early twentieth-century gas-fuel tank. Peculiarly, this was crated with glowing yellow bands of undulating ribbonlike substance tied into a giant bow.

Then a second appeared alongside the first.

"Seems to be a tank of some kind," suggested Busby. "Let's cut Elmo in and ask him directly . . . Elmo, what's going on? What are those things?"

"—Q-V-Z-S. Electronic Monitor reports solution to problem six, two-nine, eight. Contact made with intelligent life on Proxima Centauri."

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The Senator dropped his notebook as he jumped to his feet.

"A matter-transmitter field has been established at Computer Base and surrounding neighborhood to serve as a receiving center for the shipment of gleep from the second planet of Proxima Centauri. This liquid ore, when released in the form of gases, will counteract the cobalt radiation in Terran atmosphere. All that remains is the payment for the twenty billion tuns of gleep as per our trade agreement."

THE Senator screeched. "Trade agreement? Busby, what is this?"

"Elmo," chided Busby, "you can't make a trade agreement. That's against the law. Only Congress can—"

Elmo interrupted. "That would be the case, Private Busby, if it were a matter of trade here on Earth. The people of the planet Kdoolit are not from Earth—or even our own Solar System. The Senator himself would have to agree that the law does not apply."

"We'll pass a law!" shouted the Senator.

"That might prevent a recurrence," said Elmo, "but it would hardly affect anything done before the passage of such a law. That is fortunate, since gleep is essential for the preservation of life on Earth. I have solved the problem. The rest is up to you."

"To me?" said Busby. "Why always *me?*"

"To the governments of Earth," amended Elmo.

"This time," roared the Senator, "you've gone too far! You've overstepped your authority—"

"I suggest," continued Elmo, "that Congress make arrangements with the people of Asia as to payment. The shipment of gleep will be completed within forty-eight hours. I have been informed that the Kdoolans will require C.O.D. payment in full, since Earth has not yet established a galactic credit rating."

Busby was almost afraid to ask the obvious question. "Elmo, tell me. What's the payment for this gleep?"

"The best terms I could get for twenty billion tuns of gleep delivered, via interstellar matterportation, was the exchange of the ore for the continent of Asia. We're getting a bargain."

"Busby, you heard him! You heard what he said! Asia — he traded twenty-billion tuns of greep for Asia!"

"Gleep," corrected Elmo, "not greep. Yes, it was difficult to find something the Kdoolans actually needed. There was nothing else to make it worthwhile for them to matterport the molten ore over the distance of four and one-third light-years."

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"He's sold one of Earth's continents . . ." moaned the Senator.

"Only after exploring every other possibility," said Elmo.

Busby tried another angle. "You can't do that, Elmo. It's against all your restrictive tapes. All those millions of people—"

"Oh, no, not the people," said Elmo, "just the land. Though it may create problems of relocation and reorganization, that is not insoluble."

The Senator staggered around in circles as if trying to tag someone in a game of blind man's buff. "He's crazy! He's out of his mind! How can he sell a chunk of Earth?"

BUSBY suspected that he had not yet learned the complete story. "Elmo, what do they want with Asia?"

"The Kdoolans live on a planet whose land mass rests on a highly unstable molten core. It is this lava from which they are able to pump out gleep — somewhat as we pump out oil. But they are desperately in need of land. Most of what they have keeps sinking below sea level or getting upended as mountain ranges."

"Well, they can't have Asia!" shouted the Senator. "That's final. Get in touch with 'em and tell 'em we'll give anything else we can spare, but not Asia—"

"The Kdoolans," said Elmo, "have already begun delivery. Their sales representative, Kzar, informs me that as soon as the shipment is delivered in full, they will insist on payment. If we don't give them Asia, they'll just take it."

"We'll fight! Asia or no Asia, it's a part of Earth and we're not letting any aliens get a foothold—"

Elmo's voice sounded almost weary. "The Kdoolans have a culture far beyond ours. We would have no way of stopping them from taking Asia. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have a new problem to work out."

Busby avoided the Senator's stare. "N-new problem?"

"The problem of relocating the entire population of Asia."

Senator Ferdus' voice turned frantic. "You can't do that! That's half the population of Earth to spread over the other half!"

"The alternative, Senator, is having an irate party of Kdoolans take over Earth for themselves. Now, if you don't mind, I'm faced with the serious problem of transporting hundreds of millions of refugees during the next few days. Since the Computer Base is set up as a teleport station, I will use this as a port of entry."

The Senator was trying to direct Busby's attention to the screen. "Look! Look! Make him stop it, Busby! Make him stop!"

Busby saw them. There in the shimmering, widening ball of

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orange light in the meadow, framed against the background of hundreds of giant tanks, were a dozen strange creatures — serpentine things that had never walked the Earth before.

The Senator grabbed the phone on Busby's desk, and when he finally found the right end, he shouted into it. "Get me the White House. The President. Emergency. Invasion from outer space! Hello! No, I'm not crazy! Tell him to call an emergency meeting!"

Slamming the phone into its cradle, he shook his fist at Busby. "It's all your fault. You'd better do something about it — and damned quick!"

Before Busby could answer, the Senator was out of the room.

AT the secret meeting of the cabinet and the leaders of Congress, it was agreed that some other payment should be made to the aliens for the gleep.

"What if they refuse?" asked the Senator from Missouri.

"Then," declared the Secretary of State, "we go to the brink of war!"

Busby, forgetting that he was merely an invited guest, spoke up. "Mr. Secretary, Elmo won't permit war."

The Secretary glowered at Busby and thoughtfully pulled his lip. "You misquote me, sir. I didn't say war."

"But you said—"

"I know exactly what I said, sir. I said the *brink* of war. Your Electronic Monitor has no right to prevent us from going to the *brink* of war as often as we like. It is absolutely necessary as a diplomatic technique for preserving the peace. And this is a time, above all, for diplomacy."

It was motioned, seconded and passed unanimously (Busby not being permitted to vote) that all dealings with the aliens should be conducted through Elmo, and since everyone was certain that Elmo would not permit the Kdoolans to attack, it was established that absolutely no concessions were to be made.

Elmo had to find another way to make payment, and Busby was responsible for seeing it done.

Several of the Senators had ideas. The Senator from Wisconsin said that if the government would assure a subsidy, his state would be glad to provide cheese for payment of the gleep. At this suggestion, the Senator from Kansas leaped to his feet and said that wheat was the staff of life, and that the government should consider buying it from the farmers of his state to use as payment. The Senator from Texas just wanted to point out that if gleep had oil in it, it was subject to tariff, and he had to insist that his state be protected.

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Busby was confused until he remembered it was an election year. This was, obviously, the beginning of a series of speeches for the people — speeches that would be recalled on the floor of the Senate for inclusion into the *Congressional Record.*

Nobody noticed Busby leave the meeting.

KZAR of Kdoolit, a long lizard-like creature with red scales, long tentacle-arms, and two faces, was waiting when Busby entered Elmo's control room. Elmo introduced them. Kzar bowed graciously. His head appeared to be supported on a swivel base, and one of his faces smiled while the other one frowned.

"I turn the face of peace in your direction. We have come in peaceful trade, and now we ask payment for our services."

"But we can't give you Asia." Busby frowned as he replied.

Kzar immediately stirred in alarm. His glistening scales stood on end and he swiveled his head around, displaying an angry countenance. "You dare to make war?"

"No! No!" gasped Busby, trying to smile through his chattering teeth. "Of course not. I forgot about the facial expression—"

Elmo soothed his visitor, explaining the difference in facial mobility on Earth. Earthlings, he pointed out, could frown when they were really happy, pretending they had nothing to be happy about. "This," said Elmo, "prevents the envy of a neighbor or a friend. A necessary protective device. On the other hand, humans can smile when they are actually angry and even preparing for war. Very different from your people, Kzar. You must make allowances."

Kzar looked doubtful, but he finally relaxed and listened to Busby. However, argue as he might, Busby could not convince Kzar that it was impractical to take Asia. How would the United States explain to the people of Asia that their land had been confiscated as payment in a business deal with another planet? "It won't do any good," said Busby, "to tell them we're doing it to save mankind. We've used that excuse too often before."

"I see no alternative," thought Kzar, telepathing impatiently. "I assure you that neither Wisconsin cheese nor your Idaho potatoes nor Kansas wheat will serve us in the place of land. Now, if you'll excuse us, I have details to work out with your great problem solver, Elmo, about converting our gleep into gases to release into your atmosphere."

LATER that afternoon, at the White House, Busby learned that Senator Ferdus had reported to his commanding officer about

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the chess games with Elmo. It was generally agreed that Busby's misuse of Elmo had resulted in the crisis at hand. Furthermore, the Senator suggested to the Army that Busby had the power to solve this whole mess if he really wanted to, and it was obviously his lack of patriotism that prevented him from doing so. He even hinted that Busby might be a Kdoolit agent in disguise, planted here on Earth years ago to work out this diabolical plot.

When they finally let Busby go, it was with the ultimatum to find a way of preventing the loss of Asia and at the same time getting rid of the Kdoolan threat to the peace. As the General of the Army put it: "Private Busby, that's an order! See that you do it or—"

Outside, Busby sat down on the steps of the Capitol. For half an hour, he sat there feeding the pigeons while he wept. "Whatever I do, I'm going to get it in the neck. I feel like telling them to take this uniform and do whatever they damn well please with it." He sat there daydreaming about what it would be like to go home to Allenville, back to his little repair shop, where he could make his daily rounds from door to door and do little odd jobs for his friends and neighbors.

If there was one thing he knew, it was that he had no business being in the Army. He was the kind of guy who just had to be his own boss, and he had discovered to his sorrow, after so many years, that being your own boss was something they tended not to encourage in the Army.

That, of course, was what gave him the idea.

All the way back to Computer Base in the copter, he went over and over the details in his mind. There was no doubt about it, it would work. If only he was not too late.

When he arrived, Kzar was still there, and Busby — remembering to smile broadly — communicated his proposition. Kzar listened quietly, thought about it, and finally agreed to leave Asia exactly where it was. He praised Busby for a most superior solution to the entire problem. Busby smiled and let his hand rest contentedly on the metal shell that covered Elmo's master keys. From now on, things were going to be mighty different around here.

EARLY next morning, Busby admitted Senator Ferdus to the Vault and informed him that the crisis was over.

The Senator looked suspicious. "What crisis?"

"Well, the Kdoolans are gone and Asia is still where it always was. That's why I called you."

The Senator shook his head. "Busby, I don't believe a word of

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it. What are you trying to pull now?"

Busby flipped the dials on the televiewer to focus on the meadow where the Kdoolans first landed on Earth. They were gone and so were their empty gleep tanks. Once again the meadow was green.

The Senator stared. "And you say Asia is still where it belongs?"

Busby nodded.

"All right, Busby, what have you done? If you've betrayed our government in any way — given away any military secrets—"

Busby waved these comments aside. "The only thing I gave away was our problem." He flipped the dial to show the area where the Electronic Computer had once stood. "The Kdoolans were crazy about Elmo. They have tremendous problems to solve. We've been wanting to get rid of Elmo for the last fifteen years. So — the most logical thing in the world — I gave them Elmo instead of Asia."

Senator Ferdus blinked vacantly. "You gave them *what?*"

"All your worries are over. The Kdoolans transported Elmo to Proxima Centauri during the night. As far as Earth is concerned, he's completely dismantled, decommissioned, demolished. Elmo is gone."

As the words took effect, the Senator began to burble.

"You — you gave Elmo away? A multi-billion dollars worth of equipment? All the computer secrets that we've guarded all these years? You gave them away? This is treason, Busby! Treason! You can be executed for this! And I promise you, Busby, I promise you—"

Busby backed away. He had known this was going to happen, that Senator Ferdus would be on his back no matter what he did.

"Wait a minute, Busby. You're lying." The Senator paused and looked at the screen again. "You know as well as I do that Elmo was built to solve problems for *human beings.* Elmo just won't work up there on Kdoolit. And besides, there's no one who knows how to service him but you, Busby — and you're here. Come clean, Busby. Let's have the truth. What have you done with Elmo? Where'd you hide him? You ought to know you can't swipe a multi-billion-dollar government computer and get away with it. What have you done with the blasted—"

The Senator stopped. His eyes opened wide; his thick white eyebrows arched into question marks; his red face drained of all its color. He looked frantically around the chamber. The door hadn't opened, and there was no place where Busby could possibly have hidden.

"Busby?" he whispered. "Where are you, Busby?"

He looked under the desk, be-

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hind the chairs, between the rows of empty shells where Elmo's electronic computing units had, until yesterday, pulsed with thought.

"It's all just a bad dream," he reassured himself. "He couldn't just vanish into thin air. He was never here . . . "

Yet there, in the ashtray, chewed to shreds as it always was when Busby was upset, the Senator saw Busby's still-lit cigar.

"Busby!" he roared, pounding the desk with his fist. "Busby, come back!"

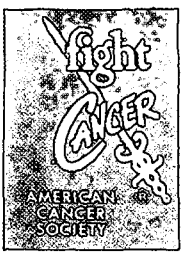
IN a hastily erected Computer Base on Kdoolit, the second planet in the system of Proxima Centauri, Mr. Jake Busby relaxed over the chess board with a tall, frosty glass of Kdoolan beer. He smiled as he recalled his last glimpse of Senator Harry Ferdus' face. As Ferdus had said, Elmo would solve problems only for humans. But Jake Busby was the one man who could service Elmo, and Jake Busby was a human, wasn't he?

And then, thought Busby, when all the problems on Kdoolit were solved, there would be no need for Elmo to manufacture new ones. There were millions of worlds in the Cosmos with intelligent life and problems to be solved. Now Elmo had a reason to exist, and, for that matter, so did Busby. They were partners in the Universal Fixit Company.

"Anyway," he said aloud, finishing the glass of beer, "it's a living — and I'm my own boss."

"Your move," said Elmo.

— DANIEL KEYES



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With fares so high and colonists so scarce, something had to be done to prevent frontier killings . . . like ruthlessly enforcing the . . .

Seven Deadly Virtues

By PAUL FLEHR

Illustrated by WOOD

I

NOBODY moaned: "Buddy, please listen to me? I'm hungry. Couldn't you at least give me something to eat?"

We paid no attention, of course.

"Oliver," Diane said. "I love you."

I stopped and kissed her. Nobody sobbed and drifted away in the mist.

All of Grendoon was down by the Wallow. Torches inflamed the fog like living lips of fire, kissing each other as they blended. The noise of the big jungle machines boomed in the background, but it was almost drowned out by the crowd, a constant bull's bellow of noise.

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"Listen to them, Diane," I said. "They're happy."

"And so am I," she whispered.

"You don't miss the plantation?"

"No."

"Nor—"

"Nor Albert," she said emphatically. "*Especially* not Albert." I felt her shiver in spite of the fact that the temperature was a hundred and ten.

Nobody clutched at my arm, looming out of the mist, but I shook him off and he flinched muttering away.

I stopped, looking at Diane. Suddenly she was tense. "What's the matter?"

She asked in a small voice: "Did you recognize that one?" It was embarrassing. I shook my head. She said: "I did, Oliver. He used to work for Albert too. And he crossed him, and now—"

The joy froze in me. I said roughly: "Snub Albert! Let's get down to the Wallow. This is our night, Diane — don't let anything spoil it."

But behind us, in the fog, nobody was sniffling wretchedly.

IT was sundown, you see. Not that we ever see the sun on Venus. But it makes a difference. During "day," we stay indoors as much as we can, and when we go out, we wear not only thermosuits and hoods, but portable air — at least at "noon." Toward twilight, we can breathe the ambient air; at dusk, we can leave off the hoods. At "night," sometimes, you can go out without even a thermosuit, but this was a long way from night.

The other thing that happens at night is that the fog begins to condense. For about two months right around "midnight," the ceiling climbs, sometimes, to a thousand feet; but all that water has to go somewhere, and it does.

It makes a nice celebration.

Grendoon has nearly eighteen hundred people living in it, and I don't think a hundred were left minding the store. Everybody else was laughing and joking and wandering around, carrying the torches, waiting for the water. The kids get an enormous kick out of it, but so do most of the grownups.

"It's coming," whispered Diane.

"I see."

Already the bottom of the Wallow was sticky red mud, like the blood that runs out of a prime roast of beef. We were at the town end of the Wallow now, following the tapewalks toward the deep part, toward the hills.

"Here you are, buddy!" shouted a vendor, grinning, and thrust a pair of torches at me. I paid him, handed one to Diane and walked on.

There's a reason for the torches, too. The English knew about it; in the old wars, before aircraft bothered much with radar, the Eng-

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lish were plagued by fog. They dug trenches around their landing strips and filled them with oil; the planes came in, and maybe the fog was too thick; so they touched off the trenches of oil, and the curtain of flame burned off the fog.

That's what the torches did. First we could see outlines, then bright beads of light from the torches themselves, and by the time a thousand torches were all aburn, we could see for more than fifty yards. We didn't need tapewalks then; we hurried down the bank toward the cheering, jostling throng.

There was a roar from the north end of the Wallow, where the sludgy creek drained thick juices from the hills. "It's coming!"

Diane took her hand off my forearm. I released her hand. We both pressed forward, looking.

In the licking light of the torches, the first thin trickle of water was coming down into the Wallow. It happens every few months, every time slow Venus makes a complete spin around its axis relative to the sun; but it was like a miracle. It always was.

Even inside my thermosuit, I felt cooler, more comfortable. It was like Iowa in October; it was like the first freeze-up on the stream that went by everybody's home, long ago. The water was coming down!

I whispered: "It's a wonderful time to be in love."

But Diane wasn't beside me.

"DARLING! Where are you?" I bawled.

And then I saw her.

She had been separated in the crowd, but she was only a couple of yards away, stumbling back toward me. I couldn't see her face, only the hooded neck and line of her jaw, obscured by the transparent mantle of the thermosuit. But it was enough.

Diane was terrified.

A huge hulking cow of a man, a face like a footprint in mud, an expression like a stepped-on lizard, was bellowing angrily at her: "Wassamatta thew? Whyntcha watchwatcha doing?"

Diane turned to me, white-faced. "Darling," she sobbed, "this gentleman says I jostled him."

"What?"

"I—I didn't, dear! You believe me, don't you?"

"Of course." But it was like a knell tolling.

"You've got to believe me!"

"I believe you." But it didn't matter; nothing mattered; we both knew the score then.

I said to the bellowing man: "Sir, my fiancee is deeply apologetic. The crowd — the excitement — all the confusion—"

He stared at me, lowering. He glanced around, under shaggy eye-

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brows, gauging the mood of the crowd around us. It didn't satisfy him. He shrugged and moved off.

"Come on, dear," I said, and urgently hurried her along.

She said: "Oliver. They won't give up. They'll try again."

"It won't do them any good!"

"But it will, Oliver," she said reasonably. "You know Albert. He *never* gives up. That was just one of his bullies. He'll have others."

I took her by the elbows and turned her around to face me. In the red and shuddering light from the torches, her eyes were dark but luminous; her face was sad and calm. Her beauty wrung my heart.

"We can take care of ourselves, Diane," I promised. But it was a lie. I knew it was a lie. Albert Quayle hadn't given up, not that easily. He wasn't going to let me have his wife without a fight.

He was out to get her — with hired assassins, no doubt.

And when she was gone, he would be coming after me. I remembered how nobody had whimpered in the fog.

"Will we whimper, do you think?" Diane asked suddenly.

It was no more than I was asking myself.

I caught her arm and turned her again toward the Wallow. Our torches were getting low. I threw them into the first few inches of silted water and we watched, without words, as they choked and died.

II

THE world had begun for me six months before.

I came down on the ship from Earth like a newborn baby, all pink and squally, tied into my deceleration-proof bassinet, crushed with the parturition pains of landing by rocket on an alien planet.

What did I know? The ads said, "Venus, the New Frontier." They said, "Venus, the planet where every man can start over," and, "Own 1,000 Acres! Be Your Own Boss on Venus!"

It wasn't any lie. It was all there.

I got out of the ship at Grendoon and got on the line at Customs. It wasn't a long line.

"Immigrant?" they asked.

And I said: "Sure. I'm going to spend the rest of my life here."

It was true. But I didn't know why they laughed.

I didn't know that there wasn't any choice. I didn't know that, once you're conditioned for Venus, you can't ever live on Earth again.

They let you wear the brassard for two weeks — everybody knows what it means; everybody gives you plenty of leeway. That's so you can find your way around. You get a place to live. You get a job. You make your plans. You make up your mind.

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Then — if you want to stay — you get conditioned.

If not, there's the return rocket waiting.

Before I was conditioned, they sold me a thermosuit and pinned a brassard on it, with the sparkling word *Visitor* brightly picked out in diamond ink. They gave me a card with Quayle's name and address on it, and turned me loose to hit him up for a job.

Then I stepped out into the hot, penetrating fog.

Albert Quayle's address was on Breezy Point, overlooking the Wallow. I struggled along the tapewalks, and even inside the thermosuit I was wringing wet. It was a hot day. The fog was whitely bright, a flour of soggy pearls that I stirred as I walked. I sucked a tube of suit air, but my face was exposed to the steam; I felt as if I were being gently boiled. Voices spoke to me out of the fog, begging; but I couldn't help them and so I ignored them as might any citizen of Grendoon.

Then I came to Albert Quayle's house.

Enormous blowers ripped the fog to tendrils around it. I could see it through a wavering haze. A big place, pink aluminum, with picture windows — to look out on fog. A big place for a big shot, and that was Albert Quayle.

I walked up the cinderblock path.

It was like a Japanese garden back on Earth. Out of the condensation sumps in the walls, a stream of hot water pulsed. It flowed through cement-walled troughs across a cactus garden; the path went over one of the brooks, gently steaming, on a little arched bridge. It was expensive; spending that much on his house, you couldn't blame him for spending enough on blowers to give it a chance to be seen. The water, of course, came out of the sluice from the air-conditioning. It had to go somewhere. But the garden, the little stream, the bridge — that took money.

That was what Quayle had. He had money, and he had something more than money.

He had Diane.

I RANG. The door opened. There she was.

I glanced at the card in my gauntleted fingers. "Mrs. Quayle?" I inquired formally.

"I am Mrs. Quayle," she acknowledged just as formally.

"I'm looking for a job," I mumbled.

A figure like a nightclub moaner. Eyes like the sad pits of Hell. Lips that tragically invited.

I tore my eyes off her and dashed them against the card again. "Your husband — they said at the office that he could help me."

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"Help you?" Her voice was like a bitter lullaby. "He'll help himself. But he'll give you a job, if that's what you want."

And then I knew I was in love.

And I knew what it meant. Because even then, not twenty-four hours on Venus, I knew who Albert Quayle was. I knew that he wasn't a man to tangle with, not in Grendoon, not if you wanted to stay alive.

But I had tangled with him after all. I had taken from him the one possession he did not care to lose.

Diane caught my hand now. She was shaking. "Oliver, Oliver. It's him."

"I know."

"That fat man — he was working for Albert."

"I know."

"He's out to get us. Both of us! Oliver, I shouldn't have let you do this. It's the end."

"I know."

"Quit saying 'I know'!" she screamed.

I patted her hand, through the gauntlet, to show that I understood. Gently I led her along the banks of the Wallow, down to where the crowd was thickest.

"I'm sorry, Oliver," she whispered suddenly. "I'd like to kill him."

"You can't."

"I know I can't, but I'd like to. If only we weren't conditioned—"

I said: "Forget it. We're through with him. As soon as your divorce is final, we get married. That's that."

I glanced at my watch, under the transparent gauntlet of the thermosuit. "Only another hour," I told her.

"Oh, Oliver!"

THAT was more like it. The expression on her face was a candy bride's, beaming from the top of a white frosted wedding cake. Only another hour and then the statutory waiting period would be over. It was hard to believe that already eleven hours had passed since we confronted Quayle with our love.

Almost gaily, we moved among the rejoicing throng. It was festival; the Grendoonians were laughing, singing, like happy children.

It was like Iowa when I was a boy. There, when the creeks froze over, the whole town would come down to the lake — the grownups to watch, the teen-agers to skate, the old ones and the babies to walk stiff-legged across the ice, everyone enjoying what the weather had done.

Here it was fog into water, water enough to fill the Wallow and make a pond of it for a few months of each year. There it had been water into ice, but the principle was the same; it was carnival time.

Nobody came sniffling up to

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us. Abjectly he asked: "Mister, please. I'm hungry! Couldn't you help me out?"

Diane shivered and clutched my arm. For an instant, I was tempted to speak, but the instant passed. And then there was a confused clamor, and the nobody suddenly turned.

"An Earthie!" he gasped, joyful, and darted away from us.

Diane stood on tiptoe, peering. "It is," she said. "Look, darling!"

And there he was, an Earthman, tall and dark-faced with the UV tan of a sunny planet; but his face was crimson with anger now. He was backed against the margin of the Wallow, surrounded by a dozen nobodies, imploring, clamoring, begging unashamed for food, lodging, for help — for everything.

His gold brassard shone clear, with the word *Visitor* glittering in diamond ink. It was an invitation to every shunned nobody in Grendoon, for only an Earthie was low enough to talk to them. Short of grubbing for roots and making treehouses in the jungle and taking their chances with swamp, disease and saposaurs, it was the only way nobodies could live, by finding a Terrestrial to help them.

But this Terrestrial was making hard work of it. He was offering them money, which was foolish — what good was money to them? And he was striking at them in annoyance, which was even worse. It was bringing him down to the level of the nobodies, almost.

"I'll have to help him," I told Dianne.

She nodded.

I walked sternly over to him. The nobodies scattered like mist before me.

THEY fled, whimpering, as I began to talk to him.

He said angrily: "Thanks. What kind of a place *is* this?"

"I'm sorry you were bothered. Don't pay any attention to them. They'll go away."

"But *why?*"

"It's the way we do things here," I said.

"Humph." He looked at me irritably. In a high, shrill voice, his face pouting like a fish out of water, he complained: "I don't think much of Venus. What a gyp! I spent twenty-five hundred bucks on this trip. I might as well have gone to the Moon."

"You're a tourist?"

"That's what they said when they sold me the ticket," he answered disagreeably.

"I'm sorry."

"It isn't your fault," he admitted. Then he tried to be a little more friendly. "Look," he said confidentially, "is *this* all there is to it? I mean the Coming of the Water, and the spirit of Mardi Gras that runs through the town and all, like

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they said in the travel agency?"

"This is all."

"Man!" He shook his head ruefully. "But isn't there, well, some place where I can find a little more excitement? I came millions of miles. I've been saving up for this vacation for years."

"Not the kind of excitement you want, mister," I told him, and turned to look for Diane.

But she wasn't there.

"Darling!" I shouted, and heard my voice drowned out in the multitudinous cries of the crowd around the Wallow. "Darling, where are you?"

No answer.

"Something wrong, buddy?" asked the Earthie.

I didn't have any answer for him. Yes, something was wrong—plenty was wrong; but there wasn't anything he could do about it.

She was gone. Search as I did, I couldn't find her. Quayle. It had to be Quayle. Somehow, in the minutes when I let her out of my sight, he had begun his revenge.

III

FRANTIC, I hurried back to the hotel. Where else was there to go?

The room clerk looked at me funny. I don't know how else to put it. It was the kind of look I got from everybody when I first came to Venus, but I hadn't seen it since I got conditioned to live here and took off the brassard.

I went up in the elevator, and the room clerk's look went out of my mind like a nobody vanishing into the fog. There wasn't room for it. The only thing I had space for in my mind was Diane, Diane gone. I hurried down the corridor and unlocked the door, my fingers shaking.

"Darling!" I cried.

But there was no answer.

She wasn't there. The room was empty—our room. We had checked into it that morning, gone out to file for her divorce, eaten, wasted a little time, then decided to visit the Wallow since we were in a holiday mood.

But that mood was gone.

It had been the slimmest of hopes that she might have come back to the hotel, but now even that hope was gone . . .

And then I took a longer look at the room. It was as if someone — incredibly, impossibly — had *struck* me.

The cigarette butts were still in the ashtrays.

A soggy towel hung sloppily across a rack.

Across the back of a chair, Diane's afternoon thermosuit lay slackly, its empty arms reaching out to the wastebasket.

The room had not been cleaned!

I turned slowly and looked at the back of the door, but I knew

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before I looked what I would see.

There was a pink slip taped to the door — pink, the color of the complaint forms of the Maids, Butlers and Domestics. I read it with cold attention, though I knew what it would say.

GRIEVANCE REPORT

Re: Room 1635, Mr. and Oliver Sawyer.

From: Joyce Trulove, 16th Floor Chambermaid.

As of this date, above persons spoke rudely to the undersigned on the phone, demanding service. Said: "This room is a disgusting mess." Also: "Get the hell up here and clean it up."

The undersigned intends to prefer charges before the Grievance Committee, pending which time undersigned refuses to deal with said persons again.

Signed:

J. Trulove, MB&D #886

I OPENED the door and went racing back down to the lobby.

The desk clerk was all smiles, with a sneer folded into the middle of every one of them. "Yes, Mr. Sawyer. The room? Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Sawyer. That Grievance Report — some sort of mistake, I'm sure. But the chambermaid—"

I said tightly: "What about the chambermaid?"

"Oh, you know, Mr. Sawyer. They don't like to be ordered around. You can't blame them."

I got a grip on myself. "Look. We didn't even call the chambermaid. Don't you understand? We were getting *married*. We came in, dropped the suitcases, grabbed something to eat down here in the dining hall, and that's it. Outside of that, we weren't even *in* the hotel."

"Oh. The dining hall, yes."

I stopped short. "What about the dining hall?"

He shrugged faintly. "You know, Mr. Sawyer. I'm sorry to have to tell you, but there's been a complaint in the dining room too."

"It isn't possible!"

The clerk whispered chillingly: "Mr. Sawyer, are you telling me that I lie?"

I said, fast: "It's just a mistake, I mean. I remember everything that happened in the dining room. The waitress was downright wonderful. Why, we talked to her! And I left her a big tip! And—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Sawyer. I'm rather busy."

I took the warning.

There seemed to be only one thing to do.

I walked across the lobby of the hotel; it was like walking through a mushy daiquiri. Ice floated on all sides of me. The atmosphere was congealed. The bellboys looked but saw me not; the elevator men glanced through me at the room clerk, but never realized I was alive; at the entrance to the dining

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room, the hostess sucked a tooth and stared at the wall and hummed quietly to herself.

I walked past her. She didn't blink.

I found a table and sat down.

In about fifteen minutes, a waitress came up to my table. "Miss," I said eagerly, "I—"

But she checked the setting with a practiced eye and walked away again.

I stared after her. More minutes passed.

I cleared my throat. "Miss," I said again to the waitress as she came to the table next to mine to take an order. "Miss!"

But she didn't respond and, after one quick, curious glance, neither did the customers at the table.

It was the deep-freeze, all right; they were cutting me dead.

And I turned back to the table, and just caught a glimpse of the back of another waitress. For a moment, I had the crazy notion that she had been about to serve me. But that notion was wrong. She had been to my table, all right; the proof was on the table before me, a sheet of bright green paper.

I read it.

It was bad.

THE pink slip from the chambermaid had been bad enough. It meant that no member of the local would ever clean a room for me in a hotel while the Grievance Report was outstanding. But all that meant was that I couldn't live in a hotel, and there were, after all, other places to live if I worked at finding them. That complaint wasn't fatal.

But the green one was more serious. It was on the stationery of the Cooks, Waiters and Restaurant Workers:

COMPLAINT

Re: Oliver Sawyer

Offense: Deliberate undertipping

Miss Gina Sortini of this restaurant served the abovementioned Customer luncheon. Customer seemed well satisfied with the service and made no complaint. Nor, according to affidavit of headwaiter, hostess and cashier, had Customer any just cause for complaint.

After Customer had left, Waitress found two pennies under plate. It was not absentmindedness. Waitress distinctly remembers seeing Customer put money under plate, whereupon Customer's Guest, a young woman, commented upon said gratuity and both Customer and Guest laughed and made several joking remarks.

Matter referred to Grievance Adjuster this date.

And that meant that eat I could or starve I might, but I would do neither of them in any public restaurant in Grendoon.

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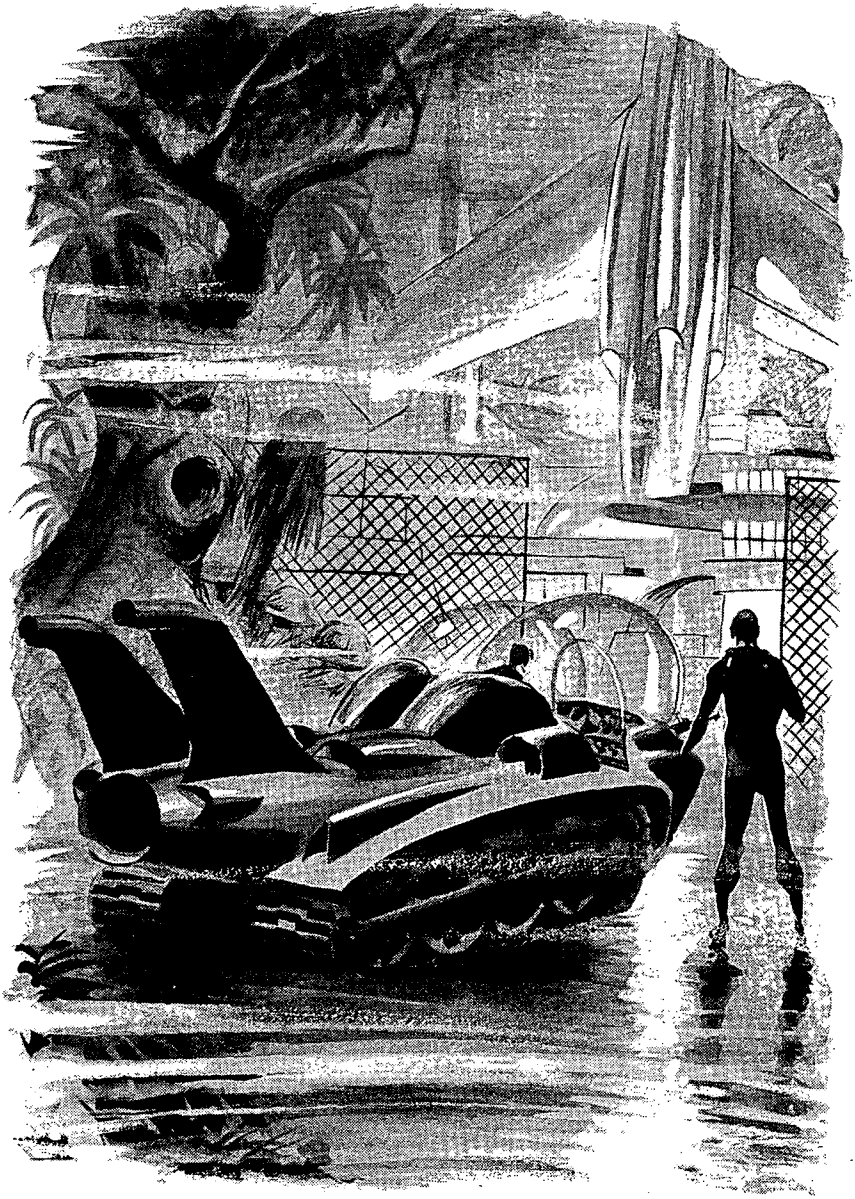

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I remembered Diane's comment and how we had laughed — that part was true. But it had been because the tip was large; I was extravagant, she said.

There was no mistake here. It was deliberate. There was no longer any possible doubt.

I got up and walked slowly away from the table. I was the Invisible Man. I went out into the lobby, hesitated, crossed it to the door. I was still carrying my thermosuit; I hadn't stayed in my room long enough to take it off.

I walked hopelessly out of the door and into the hot gray night.

There was a pile of luggage on the broad steps outside the double-paned door. I tripped over it, started to walk on, went back and looked more closely.

It was my luggage.

IV

I RENTED an armored car and raced out to the spaceport. Thank heaven it was only the hotels and restaurants so far!

But it would be more, for Quayle would never stop. I would have to face it some day and find an answer, or live through the total extinction of my personality that came with being shunned like any other nobody. But I wouldn't face it now, not until I had found Diane.

It was only desperation that drove me to the spaceport. Cryptic roarings from the side of the taped road told us of the giant machines that were at work in the Ag fields. I turned at an intersection and eased cautiously into the right-hand transverse road, the sonic feeler sending out beeps into the fog to search for oncoming cars. Abruptly there was a sodden flare of white and the giant blast of an industrial explosive behind it.

It was like that everywhere, outside of Grendoon and the other little cities. You don't remake a planet without using power, a lot of power, in all quantities and forms.

And, of course, power can be dangerous . . . wherefore the conditioning.

I drove into the spaceport through a flaming fence of natural-gas jets. A rocket was coming in. The buildings loomed queerly tall in the faint residual mist — it was strange to see the top of a two-story building. But though I could see much, I could not see Diane.

Nobody came weeping up to me on the walk outside the parking lot. I took a closer look. It was Vince Borton.

I knew him — *had* known him, when he was alive; but the time was coming when I would no longer be able to make that distinction. He was typical of the kind that hangs around the docks,

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begging handouts from the tourist. He had been a farmer before. In fact, he farmed with me. In fact, he had come in from Earth on the rocket with me. And went to work with Quayle for me; and it was because he had been caught stealing money from Quayle's pension fund that he was shunned.

He sobbed: "Mister, please! If I don't get something to eat, I'll—"

"I can't help you, Vince," I said.

I left him staring after me, a shabby nobody with a flat-footed stance and an expression of horror and surprise.

People didn't talk to nobodies.

But when somebody did, it wasn't to refuse help.

And the only explanation of behavior like mine was the true one: I was in process of becoming a nobody myself.

A high, confidential voice behind me said: "What's the matter, buddy? You don't look as happy as you did last time I saw you."

I turned. I saw a bright gold brassard with the word *Visitor* picked out in diamond ink.

It was the Earthie I had seen down by the Wallow.

"Hello," I said shortly.

AN enormous roaring seeped out of the overhead mist. Tubes bellowing, the Earth rocket settled in on the landing pad, pointing a finger of flame at Venus to destroy it and then embracing it.

And then it started again.

There was a crowd, as there always is when a rocket's coming in. A tall, lean fellow in a thermosuit of Agricultural yellow almost bumped into me. He nodded politely and started to turn away.

"Hers*hoo!*" I sneezed. And so did the Earthie, two mighty, thundering sneezes. The Aggie whirled on us. His face was mottled and raging — much more so than the offense justified!

He demanded: "What's the matter with you?"

I said quickly: "I'm sorry. Very sorry. Excuse me. Us," I added, though the Earthie hadn't much to lose. I pulled the Earthie away after me.

He looked at me with eyes like question marks.

"Sneeze powder," I explained to him in a low voice.

"What?"

"To make me sneeze on him."

"What?"

"I'm sorry I got you into it, but the brassard will keep you out of trouble. Now you'd better leave me alone."

He stared at me with doubting eyes and pouty lips. "Look, I'm just a stranger here, but I don't get it. Why the sneeze powder?"

"To make trouble."

"Trouble." He thought, and then admitted: "I heard about this kind of thing. You Venusians have your own system. Not like Earth."

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"Not the least damned little bit like Earth."

"No violence, eh?"

"We can't afford it."

He nodded. "I know. They explained it to me back at the travel agency. Something about conditioning. Venus is a frontier planet, and all frontiers are the same. Everybody is likely to kill everybody else. Especially because weapons are so powerful nowadays."

"They have to be here, because of the saposaurs. But not just weapons."

"No, I know about that. Explosives. Big machines that could shred a man into confetti. So they condition you against violence, eh? No matter what happens, once you're through with the conditioning you can't kill anybody. And if somebody is really out to get somebody else—"

"He cuts him dead." I nodded. "You have the picture. That's what's happening to me now. Now you better stay away from me—"

"Dunlap."

"Whatever your name is — we haven't been formally introduced. I don't want to get you into trouble."

I turned and left him. The world was hot and empty without Diane; I didn't want to share it with him.

But I didn't have much of a world to share.

Even less than I'd thought.

I MARCHED out toward the parking lot and there was the Aggie again. He was on the taped path; the jets were off and the fog beginning to settle in again. I thought of swinging around him, but the path was narrow.

I nodded politely. "Sorry," I said formally.

He looked at me with recognition, then with annoyance.

And then his eyes opened wide, and the expression became utter rage — contempt — hatred.

"What — what's the matter?" I faltered.

He turned away without a word, as icy as the waitress in the hotel, as completely as an anybody had ever cut a nobody.

Even if he was one of Quayle's men, there was no reason for this. I watched, incredulous.

In the haze of five yards of thickening fog, I saw him stop to talk to one of the field police. The Aggie walked on and the policeman came slowly toward me. I nodded politely.

The policeman looked through me. He saw my face and memorized it; but he also didn't see it, not at all. He looked at my chest for a thoughtful second. And then he turned and moved back toward the parking lot.

I followed.

He went to my car, produced an official electroseal, locked it. On the entrance door, he slapped

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a sticker with the glowing scarlet word: *Impounded.*

"Hey!" I yelled. "What's the matter?"

There was no reason for that! It was the sort of treatment reserved for the gravest offenders — thieves, like Vince; accidental murderers; those who used the shunning services without good and sufficient reason . . .

And one other category.

I touched my chest.

A sharp metal star point scraped my finger. Pinned to my thermosuit was a badge — no, a brassard. *The* brassard. In diamond ink, the word *Visitor* flared.

I was wearing the brassard without right. It was the lowest crime in this world.

I had been framed.

V

RUSHING back along the tape-walks like a ghost put to flight with bell, book and candle, I looked for help. The only help in all the world for me just then was the Earthie.

Vince Borton clutched at me out of the fog as I passed. "Oliver! You too?"

"Me too."

"But *why?*"

I said grimly, too full of hate and fear to answer: "Albert Quayle, that's all. Good-by." But he followed.

I found Dunlap saying angrily to another new Earthie just pinning on his brassard: "Lousy place, not worth the plutonium to blow it to hell! Take my advice, Mac. Turn around. Get right back on that rocket and—"

I stopped and said formally: "I beg your pardon."

He turned and looked at me. "Oh. You."

"Can you help me?"

Suspiciously: "What do you mean? All I want is out, buddy. I don't want to get in any trouble here."

"You can't. You're wearing the brassard."

"Maybe."

"There's no risk involved! Remember? We Venusians can't use violence. That's the first thing we do, before we take off the brassard. We get conditioned against it. And you're immune to anything else. That's what the brassard's for."

"Well? You didn't tell me what you want."

"I want you to come see how the other half lives. The Terra Club."

"What's at the Terra Club?"

"A man named Albert Quayle," I said.

VINCE hit us up for a ride back to town — in Dunlap's car, of course; I couldn't use mine. I let him, provided he sat in the back seat.

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He grinned at me wryly.

But I couldn't apologize, because the fission-blasts were going off again and the noise drowned everything out for a moment.

Dunlap demanded aggressively: "What *is* all that?"

"That's the reason."

"Blasting? The reason for what?"

"The reason for the conditioning. Every man a Zeus, with real thunderbolts, not mythical or magical. You've heard of the saposaurs?"

"Saposaurs?" He nodded. "Sort of intelligent lizards, eh? But they don't like people. They stay in the back lands."

"Most of the time. Not always. Look." I pointed to the built-in machine guns on the car. "They're needed, mister. It isn't safe to travel on Venus without plenty of weapons. And the tools! Plutonium built the Wallow. All of Venus was marsh. Most of it still is. Without the atomic explosives to shove out the water, we'd be living in jellied mud."

He said hoarsely: "There isn't any danger from the saposaurs in the car, is there?"

"Not unless one shows up."

He said, "Oh."

Vince Borton volunteered eagerly from the back seat — it must have been a joy for him to talk again — "There are plenty of them out in the fields. Not so much at night. They come in the daylight months, when there's plenty of fog."

"Why?"

"They like knives," Vince told him. "They're not really smart — sort of a gorilla plus twenty-five per cent. But they're smart enough to know that steel will outlast their teeth and claws. They never had fire and don't much want it. Steel is something else. They'll break up a car, if they can, just to take the jagged metal for weapons."

Dunlap said slowly: "But — all right, granted you have to have strong safeguards against violence, with all that plutonium around, and guns to protect against the saposaurs. What about this business of ignoring people to death?"

"Shunning them," I corrected him. "Cutting them dead. There has to be *some* way, mister. The community can't tolerate anti-social behavior. Why, if somebody insults my wife, I can't hit him — I don't know how any more. The community has to have protection against — against —"

"Against you and me," said Vince mournfully from the back seat.

WE dropped Vince at the edge of the city and followed the tapewalks to the Terra Club.

Dunlap complained: "It's hot. I don't like it this hot."

"You weren't forced to come to Venus."

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"But I can't stand this heat!" He was fretful and irritable — because he didn't like what he was getting into, I was sure.

"Watch the tape," I ordered.

Lights were ahead, bobbing like pastel ghosts in the fog. A man loomed up. He glanced at me, then through me; he nodded to Dunlap.

"Already," I said.

"What?"

"Forget it."

But it was a blow. The police weren't like the locals of the unions; they didn't content themselves with filing a protest and letting it get around to their own members. Now I was shunned by everyone; everyone in Grendoon would have seen my picture on the tri-V.

"Turn in here, mister," I told him, with my heart solid lead inside me.

The sign hanging from the tape *wheeped* faintly as we came close and its scanners picked us up, then blazed with the orange letters:

TERRA CLUB

We went in the door.

The maitre-de greeted us affably, glad-to-see-you-tonight and all that. And then I moved into the light where he could get a better look at me and I was suddenly a ghost. He couldn't see me at all.

I skinned out of my thermosuit, and Dunlap from his — but the check girl took his and there was nothing to do with mine but sling it over my shoulder.

"Ask for a table for two, mister," I said tightly.

"I'd like a table. For two."

"The gentleman is expecting someone?" the maitre-de inquired politely.

"Say yes, mister."

"Yes."

"Very well, sir." The maitre-de led Dunlap down to a table right at the side of the dance floor. That was for me, that table, not for Dunlap. But Dunlap didn't know that. The maitre-de wanted it that way. He wanted me to be seen. I mean — no, not *seen*, but not-seen by everybody. So that everybody who was not-seeing me could get a good look. Good enough so that they would know enough never to see me again.

THE table was for two, all right, but it was only one chair that the maitre-de pulled out. I had to pull out my own. And when the waiter came, he only turned one glass right-side up, spread one napkin, offered one menu.

I said: "Thank God for your brassard. Order me some scotch, mister. And a sandwich."

"Two scotches and a sandwich." Dunlap looked at me. "Ham?"

"Anything."

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"Ham, or whatever you've got."

The waiter looked at him, then shrugged.

He brought the two scotches and the sandwich and lined them all up in front of Dunlap.

I didn't mind leaning across the table to get mine. I wolfed the sandwich; already I was hungry. Later it would be worse, but I wasn't looking far ahead. I lifted my glass.

"Confusion to our enemies."

Dunlap was acting more and more nervous. He said sullenly: "But I don't know. I mean it's more *your* enemy, isn't it? I wonder if I really should get involved in a private disagreement."

"A private murder."

"All right, damn it! But this isn't much fun and it's costing me money."

"Money?" I reached in my pocket and tossed my wallet in front of him. He stared at me. "Keep it. It's no good to me. Literally. There isn't a man in Grendoon with something to sell who'll sell it to me."

He looked thoughtful. He opened the wallet and whistled.

"There's a lot of dough here, buddy."

"What? Well, why not?" I swallowed the drink. "I worked for Quayle nearly six months. Out in the boondocks. Hard work, fighting off saposaurs, handling the plutonium. Ask Vince Borton — he was there working with me. Then —"

"What then?"

"I got to talking to Quayle's wife. You saw her. Down at the Wallow."

Dunlap looked at me with a certain expression on his face.

"All right," I said. "She was his wife. But you don't know him, mister! A rat. Made life hell for her. Rough to work for — you wouldn't think he was conditioned, the language he uses. In town, he'd be shunned himself — but out on the fields customs are a little different about giving offense. Especially when the man giving offense is the boss."

He grumbled edgily: "But I don't even know this Quayle!"

"Now you do," I told him, and pointed. "He's just coming in."

QUAYLE was a toad, with a toad's face and features.

Three men were with him — overseers from the farms, big men, rough and mean men, the kind that seemed to seek him out. And there was a woman, a woman in a scarlet dress.

That would be Diane's successor. Trust Quayle! He wouldn't go long without a woman, and always a beauty. Diane had been far from the first — only three of them he'd been married to, and she one of them; the other two had died out on the boondocks. Not in-quotation-marks "died"—one got in the

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way of a saposaur, the other disappeared in the swamps. That was how Quayle had got where he was, in fact—both of them had been rich, and he inherited.

His filmed toad's eyes went mildly around the room.

He didn't see me. It was very clear that he didn't see me. After he was through not seeing me, he whispered something to one of the men, and the man snapped a finger for a waiter, and whispered to the waiter, and the waiter whispered back.

And then Albert Quayle smiled a toadish smile.

Oh, live a minute, that smile said. Live a minute longer; let yourself be sheltered by an Earthman's brassard. But he won't stay forever.

And then you're dead.

And Quayle was right, unless I found a way to handle it.

The first thing was to get Dunlap on my side. I had to show him what I was up against.

"Order two more scotches," I told him.

While the waiter was gone, I whispered: "Listen close. You don't believe that this shunning business can kill, do you? You think that simply ignoring a man can't be fatal? Watch what happens."

He scowled, almost as toadish a face as Quayle's own. "Hold on, buddy! What are you up to? If you kill this guy Quayle or something—"

"If I only could!" But then the waiter was back.

I took one of the glasses out of the waiter's hand.

He just blinked once at the remaining glass, then calmly set it in front of Dunlap. "Sorry, sir," he apologized. "You wanted two scotches, didn't you? I'll get another."

"Now watch what happens." I took the full glass and walked straight across the dance floor.

No one bumped into me, though the band was playing and the floor was full. No one noticed that I was there. They danced neatly around a moving vacuum named me.

I got to Quayle's table and stood staring at him for a second. The woman moved nervously, but no one else gave any sign that a man was standing within a yard of them all.

I shouted loudly: "Quayle!"

There was no response, none at all. Only the woman blinked.

"Quayle," I cried, "you're a rotten, stinking murderer! You're snubbing me to death because I took your wife away from you!"

And I threw the liquor in his face.

He made sure to turn his head in time—raw alcohol burns—but that was all I could see. I fell writhing to the floor.

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That's the conditioning, you see. The muscles are there, and the brain can think murder; but once the thought becomes action, even if it is less than murder, if it is violence in any form—then the conditioned reflex snaps shut. Think of an iron maiden from Nuremberg, white-hot, the spikes closing in on you. Think of an epileptic fit. Think of being boiled alive.

Combine them.

Unfortunately, I did not lose consciousness, though the room spun madly around me and I couldn't see anything but a tortured giant Quayle's face mottled and furious, with the liquor sloshing down his ugly cheek.

AFTER a few minutes, I got up painfully.

The dancers had been all around me, but no foot had touched me; every person in the room must have seen and heard, but there was no sign. The music was playing. The Terra Club was gay and laughing.

I walked shakily back to our table.

Vince Borton was standing there, pleading with Dunlap for something; but his eyes were on me. "You damned fool! What do you think you were trying to prove?"

"More scotch," I said hoarsely.

Dunlap pushed one of his glasses over. He looked shaken. "That was the conditioning?"

I nodded.

Vince said, "You're crazy! Come out of here! I came to tell you something, but—"

I cut in: "Imagine what it would have been if I'd tried to kill him."

"I can't," Dunlap admitted.

"It would have killed me."

"It *should* have killed you!" Vince blazed. (And while we were shouting, all around us the Terra Club was having a party.)

I said: "Vince. Please. Leave me alone."

Suddenly he calmed. "All right." Then he said thoughtfully, "Listen. Funny thing. You know when you threw the liquor in Quayle's face?"

"Yes. I know."

"But do you know what he did?" He nodded, satisfied at my expression. "He started to *go* for you."

"But that's not so strange," Dunlap protested. "Buddy here went for Quayle first."

"And then neither of them could follow through."

"Mmm. I see," Dunlap said after a moment; but then he shrugged. "All right," he said. "You've convinced me. You deliberately let yourself in for that to prove a point, so I guess I have to say you've proved it. Now what?"

"Help me, mister."

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"How?"

"First I want to find my fiancee. I've *got* to. But I can't talk to anyone, so you'll have to—"

"No, he won't," Borton interrupted. "That's what I came to tell you."

"Tell me *what?*"

"Where Diane is." Borton fingered his ragged cap. "I heard from one of the other nobodies. You know how it is—misery loves company. When somebody new gets shunned, we all know it right away."

"And my fiancee?"

He nodded. "Shunned. She's over at the Wallow, on an island. And the water's coming in and she can't get anybody to help her."

VI

OUTSIDE the Terra Club, I said: "Now I've got him! Quayle's in the palm of my hand!"

The hot fog closed in on all of us like a barber's steamy towel. It seemed to make it difficult for Dunlap to breathe. He wheezed nervously: "What are you talking about?"

The doorman glanced at him curiously, then away. Borton was almost treading on the man's shoes, but the doorman didn't know he was alive.

"I'm talking about Quayle! This is the end of the road for him, I promise you. I didn't want to do this, but he doesn't leave me any choice. Now that I know where Diane is, I'm going to blow the lid off. We'll go get her and then it's the end for Quayle."

Dunlap clutched at his chest, knocking the brassard off his thermosuit. He bent and fumbled for it. When he stood up, he seemed a little steadier.

"How?" he asked.

"With a little help from the police, that's how! Do you know what he's been doing? He's been smuggling steel knives to the saposaurs. I can *prove* it—with my fiancee's help! It's our ace in the hole."

"But, look. What does that have to do with you?"

"Everything! Why do you think we were shunned, Dunlap? He's behind it. He's afraid. My fiancee knew all about it. She had to. But she wouldn't have talked. And neither would I, because that was the way she wanted it. But now—"

"I know. Now you're going to blow the lid off," he said, jittering.

"You bet we are. Once we let the truth out, he's discredited—done. He'll be a nobody then, not us. And then we can appeal our cases. The courts will listen. We'll get the verdict reversed; they'll believe me when I say I didn't put the brassard on. The locals will let us off." I grinned, as confidently as I could, although I was sweating more than hot fog could justify.

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"And the pity of it," I said, "is that Quayle didn't have to have it this way. We were willing to buy him off if necessary."

THEY both stood looking at me like saposaur chicks fresh out of the egg — puzzled, surprised, ready for a fight.

"What the hell are you talking about?" Vince Borton asked me. "You don't have anything Quayle wants, except Diane—and he won't want her back. He just wants to get even with the two of you."

"That's where you're wrong, Vince. I told you. He bribes the saposaurs with steel knives, to go after the other plantations and leave his alone. But it takes a lot of knives. There are lots of saposaurs. And it's against the law, of course."

"So?"

"So he can't get all the knives he wants," I explained patiently. "But I can get them for him. Plenty! We talked about it, my fiancee and I; that was what we were going to offer him. But now — no. Now it's war."

Dunlap said tenaciously: "Explain that a little, will you? Where were you going to get them?"

"I know where there's a shipload! Did you ever hear of the *Formidable?* Old Earth ship — oh, twenty-five years back. It crashed. They did that in those days. It missed Glendoon by twenty miles, smashed itself up and sank in forty feet of mud. But I know where it is."

I let that sink in, the way the old rocket had sunk into the greasy mud.

"I found it while I was working for Quayle, digging his own drainage ditches, blasting with his own plutonium. I thought of telling him about it. But I told my fiancee first and then the two of us — Well. Anyway, we didn't tell him. And it's loaded with knives. That was twenty-five years ago, you see. They used to try to trade with the saposaurs then."

Dunlap cleared his throat. "I, uh, I think I left my wallet at the table. Wait a minute, will you? I'll be right back."

Vince Borton stared after him. Then, lowering his voice so that the unhearing doorman would really not hear, he blazed: "Oliver, you idiot! What's the use of telling him all those lies?"

"No, Vince. Don't get me wrong. They're only part lies. I do know where the *Formidable* crashed — but it isn't forty feet of mud, it's four hundred; and Quayle's own thousand-acre drainage lake is right on top of it now. He'll never recover it. But he'll want those knives, as long as he thinks they can be had."

"So? Then why did you tell the Earthie about it? Why not tell Quayle?"

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I stepped back to the entrance of the Terra Club. The noise of revelry was loud inside it, loud enough to drown out most of the distant dull roll of blasting. But I could see clearly through the double glass door.

Even through the doors, across the crowded dance floor, I could see someone bending to talk to Albert Quayle. I could see Quayle's look of worry, then the change of expression.

Avarice gleamed out of his eyes, like golden glints from a pawnbroker's sign.

"Don't worry, Vince," I said softly. "Quayle knows."

IT wasn't far to the Wallow. Vince Barton led us by the taped path to the water's edge. We were quiet, especially Dunlap.

The torches were gone. Most of the people were gone. Only scattered couples and groups were left, often drunk, all invisible in the clotted fog. The thick water in the Wallow had risen to the very edge of the tapewalk.

"Under here." Vince held the tape for us. We stepped off into sucking mud. The distant rumble of explosions was still drumming at the horizons. Venus is an enormous planet, no oceans, just swamps, so it's bigger in land area than four Earths; there is much blasting to be done, and the sound of plutonium carries.

But above the distant boom, in a moment I heard something else.

A thin, distant voice cut like piano wire at my heart. Out in the middle of the Wallow Diane, invisible, was moaning. "Help me! Please — please — the water's getting higher!"

And there were people within the sound of her voice — a good many, though most had left — and they had boats if they chose to use them. But she wasn't there for them. She was nobody. A ghost. If anyone knew she was alive, there was no sign shown.

"Mister. Get a boat."

He looked at me.

"Go ahead, man. Ask someone — anybody. They'll lend it to you, because you're wearing the brassard. But they won't talk to Borton or me."

He trudged off, muttering his worried disapproval.

As soon as he had disappeared into the fog, I said: "All right, Vince. You remember what I told you in front of the Club. Now do it!"

"Aw, Oliver! You're crazy! Do you know what you're getting into?"

"Do you want to be shunned all the little rest of your life?"

He grunted once and walked away. But I knew he didn't approve.

That didn't matter. What mattered was Diane and life.

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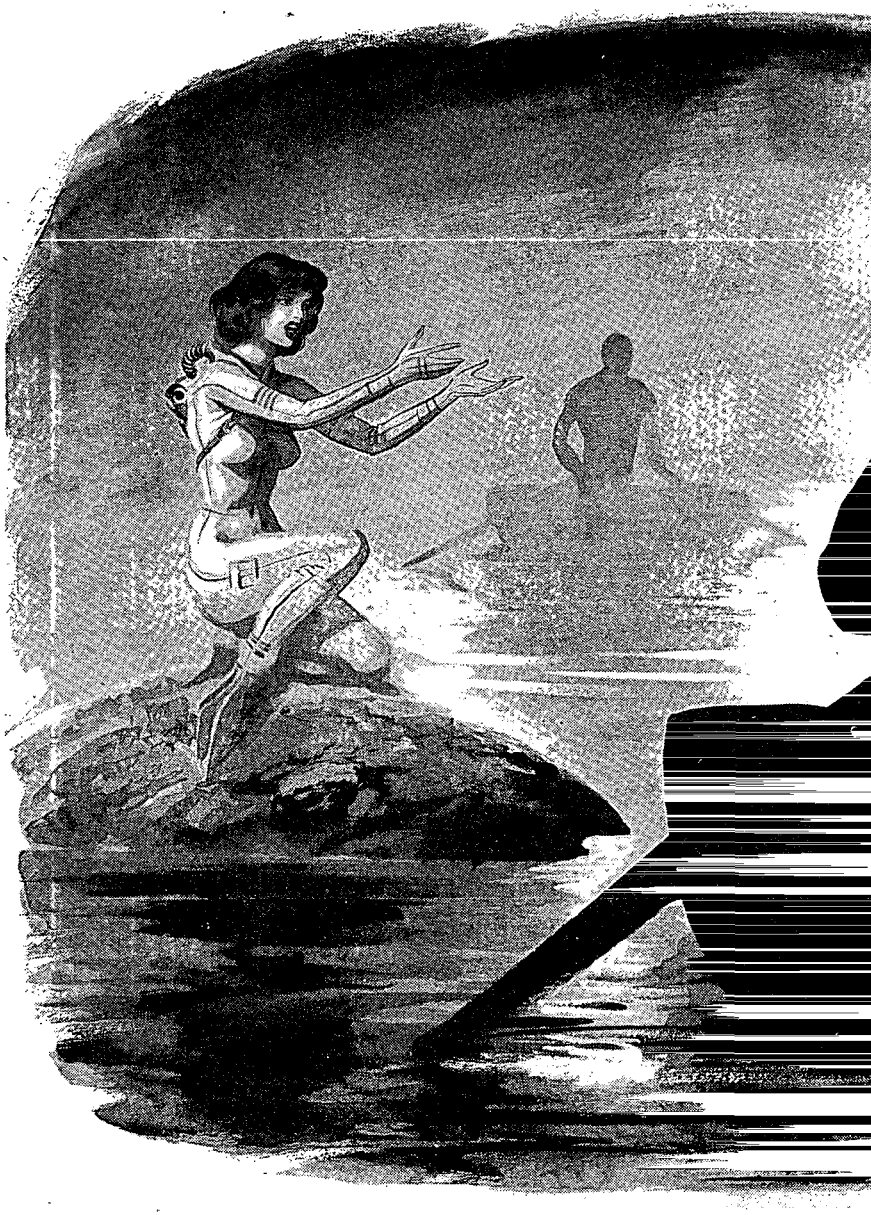

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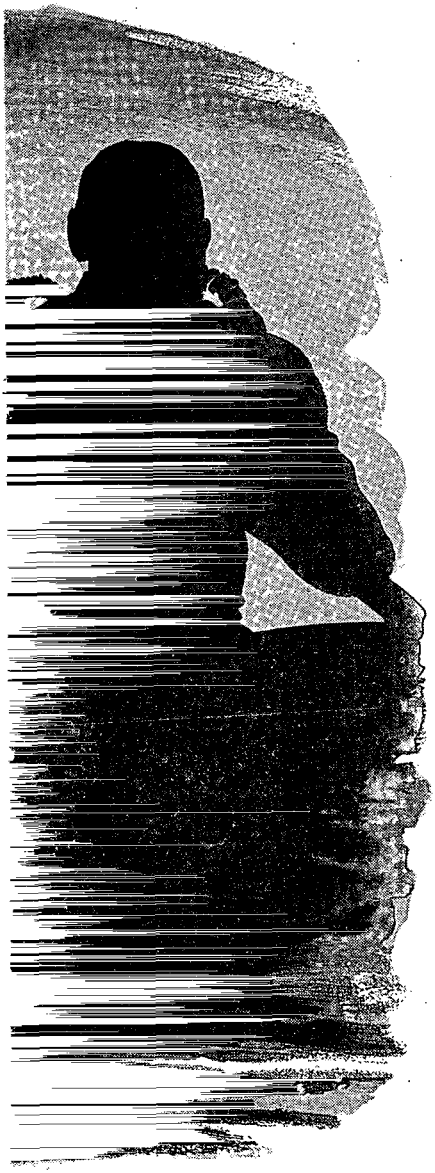

So now I was all alone in the hot slimy fog, with Diane's distant sobs tearing at me. I wanted to call to her, only there was a reason for not doing it.

But time was passing.

THE Wallow was filling rapidly now with the run-off from the hills. The air was twenty degrees colder. Still hot—terribly hot, by Earth standards; but as our portion of Venus rolled into shadow, water was wrung out of the sodden air, and it had to go somewhere. Now the Wallow was a hundred acres of steaming muddy water. All that was left of the red mud of six hours before was a few islands poking up. Diane was on one of them. But in a while, maybe a very short while, all of the islands would disappear. By full flood time, the shallowest point in the Wallow would be sixty feet deep.

And it was not merely drowning that endangered her. That water was hot.

Time was passing—

Then I heard Dunlap's wheezing breath, and a moment later the *thunk* of his oars moving blindly toward me in the fog.

"Here!" I yelled.

He found me.

I scrambled aboard, and we rowed clumsily out on the soupy lake, following the sound of Diane's sobbing voice.

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SHE cried unbelievingly: "Darling!"

I clutched at her in the mist. It was like Leander embracing Hero, still wet from the raging Hellespont; it was the meaning and purpose of all my life.

Then I felt her go suddenly tense.

She strained to see through the hot fog. In a voice that cracked a little, she said: "It's — it's the Earthie."

I looked around politely.

Dunlap was standing there in an awkward, embarrassed stance. His face was half turned away.

He cleared his throat. "I can explain," he apologized.

"Explain what, mister?"

He felt his throat. "I mean I was afraid she'd take this attitude. I knew she wouldn't understand about what happened. Here I am trying to help you and —

"What did happen, mister?"

Diane said furiously: "He's the one! He got you away on purpose! And then the fog closed in, remember? And somebody grabbed me. *Grabbed* me!"

"I know, dear."

"But it was *physical!* Only an Earthie could have done it and he was the only Earthie in sight. He grabbed me and brought me out here on a boat. And left me. And then somebody came by and I called to them and — they shunned me, darling! He did it!"

"But it wasn't me, I swear. Ask your friend here! I was with him, wasn't I?"

"You were with me for about three minutes." I patted his arm with my free hand. "But you didn't do it," I reassured him. "I know that. It wasn't him, darling."

"Then who —"

I stopped her: "Be patient, dear. Just for a few moments."

We stood there.

THEN there were voices in the fog. A boat's oars. And then a familiar whining voice, droning the nobody's familiar whimpering cry. "Mister? Please, mister. I haven't eaten in three days —"

"Vince!" I shouted. "Here we are."

He came up out of the fog, looked us over and nodded. Behind him there were other figures in the fog.

"Who the devil are they?" Dunlap demanded, fingering his brassard.

"Nobody," I told him. "Nobody at all."

There were four of them, ghostly in the mist. In the fog, they had no faces, only vague mottled shapes, and faint voices that agreed: "Nobody, mister. Just nobody."

"But maybe," I said steadily, "they won't be nobodies forever. Maybe soon they'll be somebodies again."

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DUNLAP shouted horsely: "I don't know what you're trying to pull, Oliver, but I don't like it. I'm getting out of here!"

I stood in front of him. "How did you know my name was Oliver?"

He rocked back, staring. "What?"

"I never told you my name. We weren't properly introduced."

"A visitor wouldn't know that—"

"And he wouldn't know my name either. Other people wouldn't use it in front of him without proper introductions. That would be cause for offense."

"But—"

"Never mind." I raised my voice. "Quayle! Come on out here. I know you're on the island. You wouldn't miss a chance to get knives—besides, I heard your canoe."

A moment, while Dunlap's face turned to melting butter.

Then there was a soft, sludgy sound of footsteps in the mud. Albert Quayle walked steadily up to us, his fat toad's face a mask. He glanced at Dunlap, and even in the drenching heat of that little island in the Wallow, Dunlap shuddered.

Then Quayle turned to me. He waited.

I said cheerfully: "We're ready, I think. Quayle, here. Dunlap, here. Diane and myself, here. Borton and the witnesses—"

"Witnesses?" Quayle's lips didn't move; only the word popped out of the fog and hung there between us.

"To a murder, Quayle. Yours. You're going to die."

"Ha!" He was contemptuous. "You can't kill me. I'm an important man here, Oliver. Who's going to shun me on your say-so?"

I paused. "There are other ways of killing," I said softly.

He didn't move a muscle. I let him think for a second. Then I said: "Vince, have you got what I asked for?"

He passed me something cold and sharp. It was hard to make out in the fog but I knew what it was; and then I held it up and they all knew.

"A knife, Quayle!" I said. "It's what you want, isn't it? A knife to bribe a saposaur to wreck somebody else's plantation. That's what brought you here, and now you can have this one, at least!"

He stood frozen. I took a second to turn to Diane. "Good-by," I whispered. She didn't know what I meant by that, but it was all right. If it turned out that she had to know, she would know.

And then I said loudly to Quayle: "I'm going to give you the knife—where it belongs. You put too much trust in conditioning, thinking I can't use this. But maybe you're wrong."

He licked his lips.

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"Did you ever hear of a bribe?" I demanded. "Ever hear of a man who was supposed to be conditioned — but wasn't? Well, you're looking at one and now, Quayle, here's your knife."

And I tensed, and fought my own body to do it, and I jumped for him, the knife raised to plunge into his breast.

And that was the last I saw. I fell senseless to the ground, because, you see, what I had just told him had been an utter lie.

BUT I came to, very slowly and with much pain.

A long time had passed.

I hurt in places where I'd never known there was a nerve. I was weaker than any living man has a right to be.

But I was alive.

That was all I needed to know. If I was alive, everything was all right; that was the gamble I had taken. The conditioning doesn't prevent, not quite. It only punishes. I had sought out that punishment as a bluff; but it was a bluff that could easily have killed me.

Diane was leaning over me. Blearily I focused on her face. Her scent was musky, her expression calm and passionate. "Oliver," she murmured. "You're all right. Don't worry."

"I know," I whispered. "At least I lived through it. That was the hard part — but worth it all."

I rubbed my face. There was heavy stubble on it; I had been unconscious at least a full day. I was in a hospital room.

"You didn't kill Quayle with the knife."

"No. The attempt was bad enough. If I'd succeeded, there would have been no chances at all; the conditioning would have killed me."

She looked at me with a glance of wonder and loving admiration. "You knew exactly what was going to happen, didn't you? When you said all that about a man bribing the immigration people to get in without being conditioned, it was Quayle you were talking about, wasn't it?"

I nodded.

"You were right. He wasn't conditioned. He —" She shivered. "He killed his first two wives, Oliver. Did you know that? But I guess you did. For their inheritance. And he killed others to get them out of the way. He confessed it all, once it was too late and they'd begun to shun him. And he was the one who grabbed me in the fog — from behind, so I couldn't see his face. And then when you went at him with the knife—"

"I know." I nodded again, beginning to feel better. "He hit me, proving that he wasn't conditioned."

"That's right. And with Vince

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Borton and the others to see it, there was no doubt. The police listened to them. Vince was framed — Albert admitted it."

"I know."

"And Dunlap? Did you know about him? He wasn't an Earthie; he was from one of the South Pole cities, working for Quayle, running in knives for trade with the saposaurs."

"I know. When he called me Oliver, I knew for sure, but I'd wondered since that scene in the Club. He didn't tell me what Quayle had done when I threw the drink in his face — tried to hit me then, too, and didn't pass out. Vince Borton had to tell me about it. Then there was the brassard — Dunlap must have done it, if the cop didn't, and it had to be one or the other."

Diane leaned forward. "It's all right now," she said huskily. "We can forget. Oliver, you're wonderful!"

I said, reaching out to her: "I know."

— PAUL FLEHR

ANY IMPROVEMENT?

We asked last year how communities were doing for supplies of **Galaxy** — adequate or inadequate numbers of copies, regular or irregular distribution?

Readers wrote in. A lot of them.

The result was remarkably like a revised battle plan. Reserve copies were sped into lightly held towns. Fortified positions that had held out against science fiction were breeched. Copies were liberated from under-the-counter concealment and put in the front lines.

Everybody benefited, and our thanks to those reader-scouts who did a terrain-mapping job that we could never have done on our own.

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

CITIZEN OF THE GALAXY by Robert A. Heinlein, Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y., $2.95

AT first, it appeared that Heinlein had fallen over the same fallacy that afflicted the van Vogt post-atomic series: extreme technological skill in a primitive society. Starting his story in a slave market, Heinlein soon makes his point that even in so-called enlightened eras in history, frontiers always brought slavery into being. In Sargon, capital of the Nine Worlds, sedan chairs toted by slaves are a mark of elegance.

Thorby, a young, fiercely rebellious boy, is auctioned to an old one-legged beggar who refuses to be his master. In actuality, he has rescued the boy from slavery. He teaches Thorby languages, concentration and retention.

Although their sole income is from alms, it is soon evident to Thorby that Baslim is far from being solely a beggar. This is proved forcefully one day when Baslim disappears and Thorby is hounded into hiding by the police. In accord with the old man's instructions, he manages to locate the skipper of a spaceship of the

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Free Traders and to repeat a hypnotically memorized message from the old beggar.

As foster son of Baslim, to whom the Traders owe a debt of honor, Thorby is accepted as one of the People, subject to their codes and taboos. Here, Heinlein gives an accurate and detailed anthropological picture of a small isolated culture, practicing both exogamy and endogamy as well as being a patrilocal matriarchy.

Sounds frightening, but it's a humanities course in one easy lesson.

Thorby's actual identity is a bit startling, but Heinlein is invariably logical. And invariably entertaining, I might add, even when engaged in a crusade against future slavery.

A STIR OF ECHOES by Richard Matheson. J. B. Lippincott Co., Phila., $3.00

ROBINSON'S *Power* and Maine's *Isotope Man* preceded Matheson's in Lippincott's "Novel of Menace" series. Like *Power, Stir of Echoes* qualifies in full. Matheson expertly builds a mood of horror and terror that only on one occasion exceeds credulity.

After a jocose opening, which nevertheless fits the spirit of the parlor-game hypnosis stunt that precipitates the action, the story becomes taut and gripping. Tom Wallace is the scoffing subject of his college-student brother-in-law at one of neighbor Elsie's deadly dull parties. Incredibly, he goes under.

The repercussions begin later, however, as a result of the hypnotist freeing and uninhibiting his mind. That night, he sees a ghostly woman in black. He later finds that he possesses either clairvoyance or low telepathy. He is aware of imminent or impending death. He cannot read thoughts, but is susceptible to and overwhelmed by raw emotion. His life becomes a complete nightmare because his newfound gift is completely uncontrollable and unpredictable.

Matheson rides the nightmare to the finish line in a lather of cold sweat.

THE SPACE ENCYCLOPAEDIA: A GUIDE TO ASTRONOMY AND SPACE RESEARCH. E. P. Dutton & Co., N. Y., $6.95

AT this moment of intense general interest in matters of satellites, missiles and space conquest, this first true encyclopedia comes as a godsend. It covers words and phrases of all branches of astronomy, upper-atmosphere research and guided missiles, and is literally loaded with diagrams and illustrations. It contains a

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special supplement covering the first of the satellites.

A necessity in the modern reference library.

WASP by Eric Frank Russell. Avalon Books, N. Y., $2.75

RUSSELL, old pro, has a real sleeper here. He draws on his wartime experience in the British Army and the almost incredible feats of British Intelligence in the darkest days of WW II when Britain could only sting its enemy.

The Sirian Combine and Terra are at war and, although inferior technologically, Sirius has an overwhelming numerical advantage — so much so that Terra is forced to adopt the Wasp technique.

James Mowry, Wasp, was born and spent his first seventeen years on Sirian Diracta. Special training, pigmentation and surgery enable him to pass as Sirian on planet Jaimec where he is to sting the planetary officials by one-man sabotage, rumor-mongering and assassination into crediting existence of a widespread underground anti-war organization.

Russell has invested this hard-boiled yarn with plenty of action and authenticity. A fine light opera.

ONCE AROUND THE SUN by Ronald Fraser. The Macmillan Co., N. Y., $3.95

THE IGY program is a complicated enterprise, and Dr. Fraser as Administrative Secretary of the International Council of Scientific Unions, worldwide sponsor of the IGY, has the inside track on information about it.

The title is a misnomer — the IGY was chosen for maximum sunspot activity, a period of eighteen months.

A glance at the contents page alone sets the head spinning with the ramifications of the program. Part I "On the Boundaries of the Known World" subheads the Earth's size and shape, magnetic fields, wandering poles, atmospheric jet streams, ocean current, the night airglow and chemistry of the atmosphere, the atmospheric heat engine and multiple etcs. Part II, "Toward New Horizons," categorizes the areas of cooperation among the nations for the purpose of extending knowledge of Part I.

Jampacked with data and explanation, ORTS is virtually a handbook of the IGY.

THREE TIMES INFINITY, edited by Leo Margulies. Fawcett Publications, Conn., $0.35

IF names alone sell a collection of novellas, $3X^{\infty}$ is a lead-pipe cinch: four topnotchers to three yarns is a good deal better than par. However . . .

"Lorelei of the Red Mist" by

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Bradbury and Brackett is the operatic result of a barely post-war collaboration, when neither of these talents had jelled into present solidity. It is a pleasant super-fantasy-adventure on Venus in a more-so mood of Burroughs and Kline.

"The Golden Helix" by Sturgeon is an account of the establishment of a star colony by three couples who awaken from suspended animation to find themselves either the pawns or the gods of a mysterious race. The story has the moments of poetry to be found in any Sturgeon work but doesn't rank as real Sturgeon.

"Destination Moon" by Heinlein more than makes up for the minor shortcomings of the other yarns. This masterpiece of film and print still has immense emotional impact and credibility and is of redoubled interest now that the Age of Space has truly dawned.

THERE'S ADVENTURE IN CHEMISTRY, THERE'S ADVENTURE IN ATOMIC ENERGY, THERE'S ADVENTURE IN ELECTRONICS, All written by Julian May, Popular Mechanics Press, Chicago, $2.50 each

SPUTNIK'S prime effect was to spotlight the inadequacies of American education. To supplement formal study, I will present monthly reviews of noteworthy items.

The three books above are excellently done popularizations in narrative form, full of palatable information, experiments and illustrations.

Randy Morrow, brother Sam and their science-writer father carry the thread of story continuity in each volume. In *Chemistry*, the boy's carbide lamp fails at a spelunking outing. A recommended local chemist is a teen-aged girl who teaches Randy chemical fundamentals. In *Electronics,* Randy overcomes the animosity of a maladjusted young ham operator. *Atomic Energy* sees the boys visit Argonne National Laboratory.

My only quibble is the emphasis on these being boys' books. By actual test, I have found them to be of equal interest to teen-age girls.

If Popular Mechanics intends, as I hope, to make this a series, they have set a genuinely high and meritorious standard for themselves.

— FLOYD C. GALE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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IN BLACK AND WHITE

By J. T. McINTOSH

To poke loopholes in galactic law, never advertise what you are selling . . . so you can sell what you are not advertising!

Illustrated by MARTINEZ

I LOOKED in the tank and shuddered. My lovely wife Rogan was turning into something I couldn't look at for long without getting sick. I decided not to risk looking in there again.

Ped was in the control sphere playing with a black and white board and a lot of little disks. I'd seen him at it before.

"What's this?" I inquired.

"Game I picked up on Earth. Checkers."

"It isn't in the spools," I accused.

"Is. You haven't digested them all," he accused back.

"I still have two to go," I admitted. "Is the game any good?"

He showed me. It was very simple. I said so, wondering what he saw in it.

"Try," he said, indicating the white discs.

I made a move. He made one. I made another.

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"See?" he said.

I had to take a piece. He took two. I had to take another. He moved. I took another. He moved again. I took one more.

Having got me exactly where he wanted me, he wiped me off the board.

"I see," I said. "The rule about capture makes it. Think it'll go in the Twenty Worlds?"

"Can try," said Ped. He pushed the board away. "What are you trying to sell on this planet?"

"Nothing much," I said.

Ped spat. I winced. He was an old man with a lot of nasty habits he'd picked up on the umpteen worlds on which he'd been the first Vigintan. But I had to put up with him, nasty habits and all, because I knew of nobody with one-tenth his talent in his own valuable line.

How many people could land on an alien world about which nobody knew anything and leave it six months later with complete knowledge of the language, customs and physical structure of the principal race? And no unsolved crime left on the planet, either, or suspicion among the highest creatures of the world concerned that an alien had been among them.

"You know the law," I said virtuously. "We can't exploit this or any other unaffiliated world."

"I know it," he said skeptically.

ANYWAY, it was none of Ped's business. He was retained simply to teach us enough for us to pass as natives. Rogan and I wouldn't have had a hope landing on our own, without Ped's expert preliminary work.

"What *do* you sell, usually?" he asked.

"Ergeron," I said, knowing he could find out, anyway.

"What's that?"

"It powers this ship."

"Oh," he said. "Well, they're a long way from that. Two centuries at least. They'll go to their moon any day, and the planets the following week. But deep space . . . they won't be buying ergeron for three centuries at least."

"Well, I guess my company will still be around in three centuries," I said. "And they'll still have to use ergeron. It's the only way, theoretically."

He spat again. I decided to terminate this conversation pretty quickly. I didn't like the turn it was taking.

"What are you selling *now?*" he asked.

"I don't know." Before he spat again, which seemed to be his unhygienic way of saying "I don't believe you," I went on hastily: "That is, I don't know what we're going to call it. What we're going to say it will do, I guess."

"You mean it won't do it?"

"No, it'll do what we say." I

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turned away. "If I digest the other two spools now, can you get the metabolism change started?"

"Right away. Your wife should be pretty well along."

I shuddered again. "She is. I looked."

"Wait," he said. "One thing you'd better know. It's not on the spools. It's no more than a hunch about these people."

"Think I'd better hear it, if it's only a hunch?"

"Obviously. You're going to do something good? Bad?"

"Good, I'd say."

"Naturally you'd say." He spat. But this time I was a long way away. "Remember this. These people see things in black and white. No grays. You're a friend, everything you do is fine. You're an enemy, nothing you ever do can be right. They like you, you're in. They hate you, you're outside for good."

"Thanks," I said. "That may be useful. We should convince them at all costs that what we're doing is good?"

"You'd better," said Ped.

NEXT time I saw Rogan, things were different. I was one of the things that were different, and that made a big difference in the way she looked to me. Now it was Ped who made us both sick.

We didn't have to look at him, but we had to smell him. It was a pity that the two species, Terran human and Vigintan, could use the same atmosphere and temperature range. Being Terran and being in the same room with a Vigintan was an experience we could have done without.

Like and dislike are a lot more physical than you know until you've made a body-change. I'd seen Rogan as a Terran and I'd been sick — but that was when I was Vigintan. Now that we were both Terran, she was wonderful, far more beautiful than when we were both Vigintan. That meant sex was a stronger impulse on Earth than on the Twenty Worlds.

Rogan was thinking the same thing. She murmured: "This is going to be interesting. On some worlds, sex is nice; on other worlds, it's nasty; but on any world there's nothing quite like it."

"Where there *is* sex, that is," I remarked.

"Where there isn't, I don't go. I have better things to do than be a neuter."

"When do you want me to come back for you?" Ped interrupted. We spoke English, he Vigintan—it was easier that way.

I reflected. "How much local currency did you say you'd collected for us?"

"Ten thousand dollars."

I checked that against what I'd learned from the spools. "Which isn't exactly a fortune."

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"Best I could do."

"We'll have to start in a small way. I guess we'll need six weeks." I wanted so much to get away from the Vigintan smell that I could hardly think straight. We should have fixed all this before making the body-changes — or made Ped resume his Terran shape.

"Think six weeks will be enough?" Ped asked.

"Yes. Let's go, Rogan."

"Haven't you forgotten something?" Ped asked mildly.

"I don't think so."

"They wear clothes on this planet."

I groaned. "We'll put them on in the landing car," I said.

"It couldn't be that you don't like my company?" Ped inquired.

"I hate to say this," I said, "but you stink."

"So do you," said Ped, unruffled. "Both of you. Also, you look—"

"I know," I said hastily. "Vigintans and humans are different. Let's leave it at that."

I shut the door behind us. Almost at once, the landing car's air refiner swirled away the last traces of Vigintan scent — though to call it that is to flatter it — and we breathed delicious clean air.

"We don't know how to wear these things," Rogan objected, stirring the little pile of clothes with her foot. "We should have let him show us."

"I know," I said, "but I couldn't stand it any longer."

"I know what you mean," she said feelingly.

The little car was falling away from the parent ship. It was time to make ourselves into civilized Terrans.

We knew a lot about Earth from the spools we'd digested, but that was all theoretical, and putting clothes on is practical. Though Rogan knew what the little wisps of white nylon were meant to be, it needed quite a lot of experimentation to get them on right. Imagine putting on a brassière for the first time, when you haven't seen anybody putting one on, or wearing one. We kept putting things on back to front, and telling each other doubtfully: "I'm sure that can't be right."

However, when Rogan looked at last as if her dress had been painted on her, we were sure that might be right. Funny how backward peoples can think of things that escape far more advanced races — zip-fasteners are wonderful, and when we sell the idea in the Twenty Worlds, it'll pay for the trip twice over. That's if Ped hasn't sold it first.

My clothes gave me less trouble, once I had figured one thing out. Rogan's fastenings were all at the back, which gave us the idea all mine must be too, only they weren't. My clothes were pretty

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crumpled by the time I'd established that.

By then, we had landed in the spot Ped had picked — soft soil four hundred yards from a highway two miles outside a small town called Gelland. We got out and set the landing car to dig itself in. Half an hour later, there was only a big patch of darker soil to show where it was, and that wouldn't last long under a hot sun.

We took careful bearings, picked our way to the road and started to walk to Gelland.

"JESUS, it's hot," said Rogan.

"You're not supposed to say that," I reminded her.

"Am I just supposed to fry in silence?"

"Not that. Women don't say 'Jesus'."

"But it's part of the local religion. Aren't women supposed to be religious?"

"You didn't digest spool eight," I said accusingly.

"I did too. I know women aren't supposed to say 'Jesus,' and — and — but the spool didn't say why not. I don't think it's fair that men should be able to use some words and women shouldn't. Most of them are very useful words. Anyway, I'm going to take this dress off."

"You can't. Didn't you digest spool three?"

Rogan sulked.

Those references to digesting data may be misleading because it is also a Terran idiom. That, however, is only a metaphor; we really digest information — we eat it. Some long-ago genius — I don't know if he was Vigintan or there was a Vigintan middleman involved — couldn't see why it had to be a metaphor and experimented till he came up with an edible neuron tape onto which information could be — well, fed — and the tape — how else can I express it? — fed directly into the brain. Easy, cheap, permanent.

We saw a tall, yellow-haired youth ambling along the highway in our direction and braced ourselves for our first effort to convince a human that we were human.

"Excuse me, sir," I said.

He stopped, but looked surprised. "Why? You ain't done nothin'," he said.

Hastily I checked back, and there it was. On accosting a stranger, say, "Excuse me, sir or madam, as the case may be." Damn Ped. He'd got it wrong.

"How do you know?" demanded Rogan, unable to leave well enough alone.

Curiously enough, this seemed to be the right thing to say. The yellow-haired youth grinned, and it seemed we were all right.

"Does this road go anywhere?" I asked.

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Now I knew as I said it that that wasn't quite right. I should have said something like "How far to the next town?" But there was no need for this character to say:

"Naw. I been watching it all day and it ain't moved yet."

WE had been unlucky enough to meet a humorist. We possess a sense of humor too, but there was no telling if it was the same. As a matter of fact, it is, more or less, but we didn't know that then.

"How far to the next town?" I asked warily.

"Three miles," he said. "Maybe four."

Rogan turned to me resentfully. "Ped said it was only—"

I dug her in the ribs. "Thanks," I said to the youth.

"Think nothin' of it."

"I won't," I assured him courteously.

He stared at us and moved slowly on.

"I wonder what we did wrong," I mused when I was sure he couldn't hear me.

"I know what we did wrong," Rogan complained. "Trusting that Ped! Three miles — that's about six thousand five hundred of these steps . . . Jesus!"

"I told you not to say that."

She said a coarser word. "If it's actually that far, I am not going to carry this ridiculous extra weight," she declared.

She took off her dress.

Almost immediately a car, the first we'd seen — naturally Ped had picked a very quiet roadway — came up behind us, went past us swerving all over the road with three faces goggling at us and came to a halt about two hundred yards further on. Before we reached it, however, a woman got out of the back seat, pushed over the man in the driving seat and drove off.

"Well, what do you know about that?" said Rogan.

"If you don't put your dress back on," I said grimly, "I will."

"Idiot," she retorted. "You'd never get into it."

"Refer to spool seven," I said. "When to wear which clothes."

"I was half asleep when I digested that," she admitted. "Oh, well, I guess you're right. Zip me up the back."

THERE were a lot more mistakes we made, but a couple of days later we were past the worst. We knew that if people looked old-fashioned at us, we just had to pretend it was all a joke, and we knew that almost anything Rogan said was regarded as a joke anyway. We knew that the yellow-haired youth had stared because people don't walk along a highway dressed as we were and

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not carrying anything. We knew that if we'd said our car was out of gas, he'd have been satisfied — only that might have landed us in trouble too, when we failed to produce a car, so perhaps it was just as well that we hadn't made any explanations.

We took a hotel room — not the first we tried; the second. It was a pity about that first hotel. Ped had told us about wedding rings, and made one when he made the clothes, but Rogan had forgotten to put it on. It was probably still on the floor of the landing car.

AT the second hotel, there was no trouble.

The first thing was to make some of the stuff I'd developed on the ship and find a name for it. We wanted to call it Elixir of Life, but found that had been used. Every name we thought of had already been used.

Then Rogan read a wonderful book called *Alice in Wonderland* and we decided to call it simply Drink Me.

There were difficulties in making Drink Me, and not the ones I'd expected. It wasn't in the least difficult to get chemicals and drugs; the trouble was that they weren't quite what I expected when I got them. Standards were different, but I'd anticipated that. What I had not considered were the impurities.

Seems obvious, but I hadn't realized that what a chemist calls impurities are quite arbitrary, and different in every culture. Iodine is an impurity in salt if you don't want it. So are air, water, oxygen, hydrogen, carbon, in anything. I kept finding that human chemists had gone to enormous trouble to remove from this or that something that I wanted left in, and hadn't bothered about something else that I wanted left out.

Water was worst of all. On my home planet, we seldom bother to distill water; consequently, our standard is undistilled water. Shocking chemistry on Earth, I know. Trouble was, neither fresh water nor distilled water reacted quite the way I wanted, and I had to go to a lot of trouble to introduce the proper impurities.

"Call yourself a chemist," said Roger derisively, while I sweated blood.

Despite the difficulties, I had a couple of dozen bottles of Drink Me ready in a day or two. Then we saw a lawyer and fixed up the legal side. That was easy, because we didn't care much about exclusive rights.

That puzzled him a lot.

I couldn't very well explain that after a week or two we weren't going to be around to collect the cash, so we didn't care who got it.

I had a few thousand labels printed. They said:

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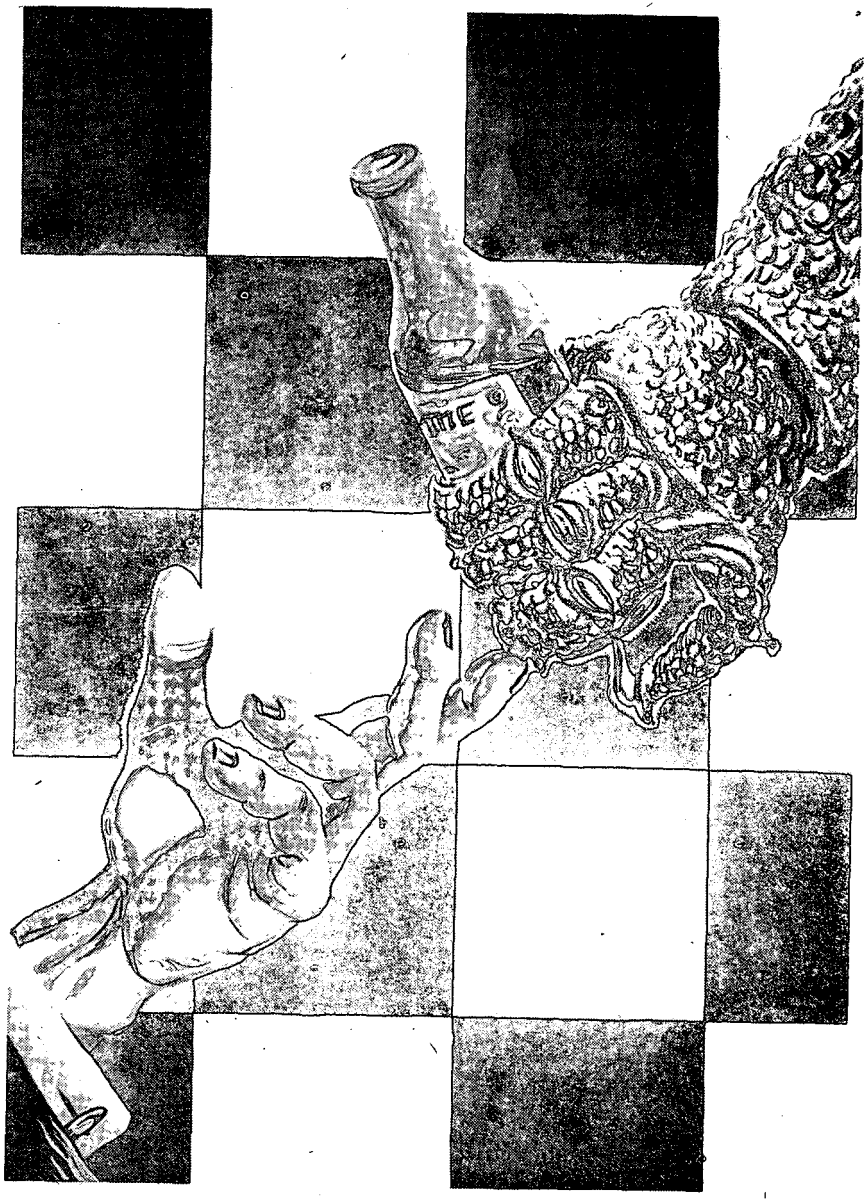

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DRINK ME
for Coughs
Colds
Catarrh
Bronchitis
Asthma
Headaches
etc.

In small type, the formula was given, but there was a warning that the manner of preparation was important. If an ordinary Earth chemist made it up according to the given formula, the result would be harmless but wouldn't work.

On the Twenty Worlds, we're not geniuses and we don't know everything. In biology, however, we have practically all the answers. Making ourselves Terran bodies was just one of our party tricks. The elixir was another. With the information Ped had brought back, it had been child's play for me to throw Drink Me together.

Getting it on the market wasn't nearly so easy. After buying clothes and things, and living expenses, we only had seven thousand dollars left.

"A real Elixir of Life and we can't sell it," Rogan sneered.

"We haven't tried yet. You're the saleswoman."

She perked up at that. She'd had nothing to do so far. "What do I do?" she asked. "How do you sell things here?"

Unfortunately, we didn't quite know. We could have hired somebody to sell the stuff for us, if only we'd known whom to hire. But things are awkward when you're in a strange land, no matter how much theoretical knowledge you have about it.

What we eventually did was this. Rogan made the rounds of the various drugstores in town, buying aspirin or bromides or paperback books, until she found an owner who had a heavy asthmatic wheeze. It had to be an owner, of course. Then she told him brightly there was no need to wheeze like that. She was traveling for a firm which had made asthma prehistoric.

"Just try this," she said, producing the bottle. "I'll be back in a couple of hours."

"Hey, wait a minute," wheezed E. Levitski, Prop. But Rogan was gone.

When she went back, his asthma had completely gone.

"It was too easy," she told me later. "He fell over himself to buy a couple of gross. What's a gross?"

I explained as I made up the couple of gross. We delivered them.

"Now what do we do?" Rogan asked.

"We take a holiday," I said. "This job is finished, honey."

WE spent a couple of weeks having fun in our part of Earth. There were forests, lakes

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and rivers, and we liked it all. We weren't much interested in the people everywhere. Every town in the Galaxy is full of people.

But we liked the fishing and we liked bathing.

Bathing — now there's something.

Nobody on the Twenty Worlds has ever willingly immersed himself or herself in water. Maybe that's one reason we smell. Another reason we don't do it is we'd never come out. It's all very well for Terrans — they float.

How we came to learn to swim was, Rogan was moaning as usual about the heat when we happened to see a couple of girls in bathing suits. Nobody had told us about that. Ped had been too busy otherwise to find out about bathing suits — and, as I said, he was an old man, anyway.

Naturally, Rogan had to get into a suit. Then she found what they were for.

We were horrified. Rationally, we knew it was quite likely that human bodies would float. Emotionally, we knew too well that if we went into the water, we'd sink like stones.

BUT Rogan was still hot and the water of the lake looked beautifully cool. She waded in, waving good-by.

Five minutes later, she could float. It was amazingly easy. And after that we spent a lot of our time in the water.

At the end of a couple of weeks, we went back to Levitski's to see what had happened.

Nothing had happened.

I couldn't believe it. He had sold a couple of dozen bottles of Drink Me, but that was all. And he'd only been able to do that because he'd been telling everybody with obvious sincerity how wonderful the stuff was.

Could it be that everybody who had bought the stuff had been 100 per cent healthy and sane?

Two days later, however, we had the first nibble. Levitski rang up to ask for more. Somebody had come in and bought his entire stock.

I made more. And more. And more. Soon I couldn't make it fast enough.

It was a shock to learn, however, that people were simply buying it as an asthma cure.

We set up a small factory to make the stuff — it was simple enough, so long as I supervised operations. And then orders started coming in from all over the place — one from as far as Philadelphia, nearly a thousand miles away.

Then one day, when I arrived back at our hotel, Rogan was looking excited and secretive.

"There's a man to see you," she said. "Dr. Byron. Do you think he suspects what we are?"

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I went in to see him and find out.

DR. James Byron was a youngish man, very energetic and excitable. "Mr. Smith?" he said.

I admitted it, then also cautiously admitted that I had developed Drink Me.

Dr. Byron produced two large plates which I recognized as chest X-rays. "You're not a doctor?"

I shook my head. "Just a chemist."

"Nevertheless, you might find these interesting." The first X-ray showed three tubercular cavities. In the second, the cavities were much less distinct.

"You see?" said Byron excitedly. "Regeneration. Do you know anything about this, Mr. Smith?"

"Only what you've told me," I said. "This is unusual, isn't it?"

"There was precisely one week between these X-rays," said Byron. "And the only thing I can find to account for this astonishing change is that my patient took some of your product. Against my advice, I may say. I repeat, Mr. Smith — do you know anything about this?"

"We never claimed that Drink Me was a cure for tuberculosis," I stated.

He stared at me. "Why not? In my experience, drugs of this sort are supposed to do anything. I sometimes wonder why anybody ever dies."

Sarcasm. Obviously this was a case for Rogan. I brought her in.

"This is the sales representative," I said. "My wife Rogan."

Byron fixed her with his rather wild gaze. "Mrs. Smith, what is this product for?"

"Coughs and colds," said Rogan brightly. "It positively won't make hair grow."

"Will it cure tuberculosis?"

"Well," said Rogan judicially, "it won't do it any harm."

"Bronchitis, asthma, silicosis, pneumonia?"

"I can only suggest," Rogan said, "that you try it and see."

"I will," said Byron.

AND he did. He was back three days later, dazed. "This stuff seems to cure any respiratory ailment. —

"Oh, that's good," Rogan said. "I was sure it would be good for something. My husband's very clever."

"I'm beginning to wonder if you are, too," said Byron thoughtfully. Curiously enough, now that he had found something to excite him, he seemed much less excited and much more thoughtful. "In fact, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, I'm beginning to get ideas about you two."

We couldn't help exchanging startled glances.

"I'm just wondering," said Byron, "when you're going to stop charging a dollar a bottle and start

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charging, say, fifty dollars."

"Oh," said Rogan, relieved that that was all he was wondering. "You think we should?"

Byron stared hard at her. "What else won't this thing do besides not making hair grow?"

"Well," said Rogan, "we never said it would cure cancer."

Byron jumped in the air and scuttled out.

"Six weeks was a good guess," I said complacently.

Once you start a huge ball rolling, you can't stop it if you try. As it happened, we didn't want to stop it.

We were gradually becoming famous. So was Drink Me. Our pictures appeared in the papers. We were on newsreels. We sold a bottle of Drink Me in Washington. The President had had a cough.

Rogan was asked to sponsor a brand of stockings. Somebody had noticed her legs.

A famous male film star rang us up and asked plaintively if it was quite true that Drink Me wouldn't make hair grow. We said sorry, yes.

Rogan was asked to sponsor a shampoo. Somebody had noticed *her* hair.

A Kentucky farmer claimed to have got drunk on Drink Me. He didn't sue; he was delighted. We couldn't account for the incident. It turned out that his wife had put the medicinal brandy in an empty Drink Me bottle.

Rogan was asked to sponsor a new girdle. People were noticing too damned much about Rogan.

Indeed, it was high time we disappeared.

The next time Dr. Byron called to see us, he had a fat German doctor with him, a Dr. Hans Austerlitz.

"It is not possible," Austerlitz declared, "to cure cancer in a week with a drug orally administered."

We agreed.

"Besides," said Rogan, "it's against the law to claim to be able to cure cancer at all. You know that, Doctor."

"Nevertheless—" began the Herr Doktor.

Rogan stopped him. "Dr. Austerlitz, we make a cough mixture. Please don't embarrass us."

"But—" Austerlitz tried to continue.

"Please," said Rogan.

SHE was right; it was embarrassing.

I'd never forgotten what Ped had said about these people. We were public benefactors. So long as we were careful to stay public benefactors, everything we did was fine. Everybody loved us, except people who couldn't get Drink Me.

There had inevitably been a rush of imitators. One of them was called Drink This, another Try

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Me. They looked and tasted exactly like our product.

But they didn't do anything, of course.

People bought them only when supplies of Drink Me failed, which was often. We only had one small factory trying to supply the whole of the United States, and after that the rest of the world. We'd been careful to ensure that samples reached every part of Earth.

The last time Byron called on us, he had a positively glassy look in his eye.

"Another thing you didn't claim," he said weakly, "was that Drink Me would cure insanity."

"That's right," Rogan assented. "We didn't claim it, I mean."

"Well, I've tried it," said Byron. "And in all cases there is a distinct improvement. Ordinary people who take it seem to have their minor neuroses cleared up for them."

He stopped and looked at us pleadingly. "What is this stuff?"

"A cough mixture," said Rogan brightly.

"I'm beginning to get ideas again," he said. "I tried to duplicate your product. I couldn't."

"You didn't do it right," I said.

"I wonder. Once people have had a thing like this, they've got to go on having it. You could hold the world for ransom, you know that?"

"He wouldn't do a thing like that," said Rogan, very shocked.

"I wonder. Can anybody make it but you?"

We saw no reason to tell him.

Just two days before we were due to leave, a very awkward situation arose. The President wanted to see us. His cough was better. Besides, new legislation was to be passed to buy up the Drink Me formula, plant, equipment and process for the benefit of all humanity. Apparently any time anything important happens, human beings have to pass laws about it.

We managed to fix an appointment for the day after we'd be gone.

Our last morning we spent swimming. As we lay in the sun afterward, Regan sighed: "I'm going to miss this, Jac."

"Me too," I said. I looked at her, slim, tanned, provocative in a white sharkskin two-piece. "There's a lot of things I'm going to miss."

"I'm almost sorry about what we're doing to them," she said.

"Only almost?"

"Yes, only almost. It's a good idea for a sales team to be two people in love with each other. If I'd been single, I'd have fallen in love with some human male and would probably have stayed here. And if you'd been single—"

"I never saw a girl half as pretty as you."

"You didn't look," she said complacently, flexing sundry muscles

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and making my hair stand on end.

Soon we had to go. We had left everything; the people at the factory, the reporters, Byron and the others could have no clue that we'd been planning to disappear. All we had with us as we walked out that same road were the shoes, shirt and pants I wore, and the shoes, shorts and blouse Rogan wore.

We were picked up without a bit of trouble by Ped.

YES, we did miss Earth. I didn't know how much until we were back in our own bodies and I found that even my Vigintan mind remembered Rogan wistfully as a human female.

I saw to my disgust that, while we'd been gone, Ped had been perfecting a form of zip-fastener which he obviously intended to sell on the Twenty Worlds. There was nothing we could do about it; he was first.

I took my revenge by beating him at checkers. On Earth, I'd played quite a few games.

"Well," he said, "have you murdered them?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Wrecked the place, so that we can move in? Given them something they can use to kill themselves with? Or what?"

"You know the law," I said.

Ped spat.

"He's ill," said Rogan solicitously. "Let's put him to tank, Jac."

"I'm not ill," Ped retorted, surprised.

"You must be. You're spitting. You take his leg, Jac, and I'll take his heads."

I should have thought of that. I only saw Ped spit once more after that.

"What did you do to them?" he demanded. "You couldn't sell them ergeron, so what *did* you do?"

We saw we'd have to tell him.

"We made an investment," I said.

"We cured them," said Rogan.

"You did what?"

"Cured them. Left them a drug which mops up practically all their diseases. Lung infections, malignant growths, most heart diseases, paralysis, brain disorders."

"And just what do you hope to gain by that?"

I sighed. "Well, with the drop in neurosis, they don't fight wars. Won't be able to now. The stuff also makes both sexes universally fertile. All the killing diseases and war are out, so they'll breed like flies."

"So?"

I sneered. "I thought you could play checkers. A few years and their world's full. Before that, they've gone to the Moon. They find how to make homes on Mars and Venus, because they have to. Then on Mercury, the asteroids

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and Jupiter's moons, because they have to. Then Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto — even Jupiter, because they have to."

Ped grunted. "Then they buy ergeron, because they have to. I might have known. *Did* know. And I bet it'll cost them plenty."

"Naturally. And it won't be so very long either."

"Poor little Earthmen. They should have shot you both."

"I've got an idea," Rogan remarked, "that they're erecting statues of us right now. They're nice people."

"Who see things in black and white," I supplemented. "And if anyone was ever white as snow, we are."

Ped spat.

— J. T. McINTOSH

Ah, one may well say, there is indeed good news next month: two established favorites return like brighter-than-ever comets, and an unfamiliar name blazes forth for the first time on the sky map of science fiction luminaries — unfamiliar now, but not for long.

LASTBORN, an Isaac Asimov novella, fresh and resourceful in ideas, taut in suspense, wonderfully warm and tender: Scientific experiment or not, the patient is the nurse's responsibility . . . and all the more so for having died endless centuries ago!

THING OF BEAUTY, a Damon Knight novelet, shrewd and sharp and laden with all the good things of Earth: Here is the gizmo that can put Gordon Fish in the chips — or land him right in the soup — and he can't possibly know which he is ordering!

FROM AN UNSEEN CENSOR, a sparkling novelet, introduces Rosel George Brown, the new name that should soon be as familiar as any in the field; a Southern gentlewoman, Mrs. Brown has a muscular inventiveness and a hearty, ingenious humor, as for example: You can't beat Uncle Isadore — he's quick and he's dead — but that is exactly what he is daring his bewildered nephew to do!

Short stories, features, including return of editorials — plus THE LAST OF THE MOAS by Willy Ley, a bird much stranger even than its almost unbelievable appearance would suggest, victim of a tragedy that should never have happened, bone (literally) of contention between scientific factions that recent developments are forcing into the same encampment — and least likely suspect of a discovery that may yet be made.

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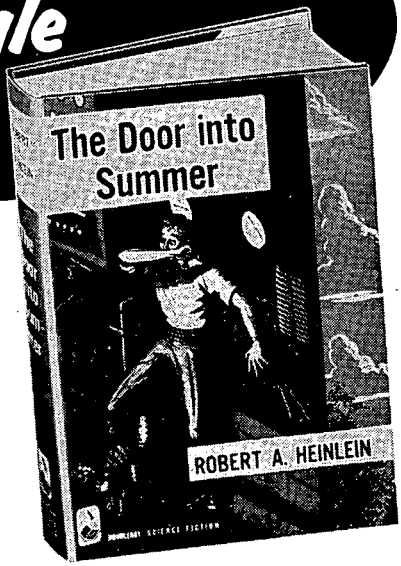

—*Continued from Back Cover*

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—Continued on other side

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